

PRAYERFUL PREPARATION: ELDER EDUCATION AS SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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## ABSTRACT

The Presbyterian Church (USA) is governed by ruling elders in its congregations. These lay leaders are required to go through a course of education prior to assuming their office. The exact nature of that training is not made explicit in the church's constitution, so it is left to each congregation to discern a program that will prepare their ruling elders for faithful service. This mandated moment is an opportunity for positive spiritual growth. But many of the approaches to this task have relied on a heavily didactic method that focuses on transferring information, rather than a devotional method which focuses on spiritual formation. What is offered here is entitled "Prayerful Preparation: Elder Education as Spiritual Formation." The question is whether a course of education that emphasizes daily Bible study, daily prayer, and reflection will move elders towards greater spiritual growth and make them better prepared as they assume the office of ruling elder.

## CHAPTER ONE

### ELDER EDUCATION AS PROBLEM AND POTENTIAL

It is said Woodrow Wilson claimed that the most important vow he ever took in his life was not the vow to become President of the United States of America, but the vow that he took to be a Presbyterian Elder. He considered it his highest honor to serve the church that had nurtured him in the Christian faith. It was the highest calling to which one could aspire. It was the pinnacle of service.

Many others have followed in his footsteps—not to the White House, but to the office of elder. Many have answered the constitutional questions that have set them apart for their service as presbyters in our church. Many of them have approached that moment with the same kind of trepidation and humility that Wilson must also have experienced. It is not an easy thing to say yes to God and the people of God.

But the church must have leadership, and in the Presbyterian Church (USA) (hereafter referred to as the PCUSA) we are true to our Reformed roots; we insist that the leadership of the church be done by the priesthood of all believers. We reject the kind of clericalism that was the source of such tension for Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers. A church that is ruled from on high by mortal men was not the church of Jesus Christ. Did not Jesus choose ordinary people as Apostles for the new movement which would be called the church?<sup>1</sup> Did not Moses take the advice of his father-in-law and choose wise men to assist in his governance of the people of Israel?<sup>2</sup> Did not the counsels of the early church choose deacons after much prayer and consideration of their

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:18ff. All Bible references will use the English Standard Version or ESV.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 18:13ff.

qualifications?<sup>3</sup> Did not Paul choose others, both men and women, to assist in leading the fledgling churches that he had planted and nurtured while he was present with them?<sup>4</sup> Had not God called forth new leadership in every age to guide the path of the people of God wherever they may be? Our Reformed traditions tell us that God calls all manner of people for spiritual leadership. We will be governed by those who are our equals, and we will choose and call those whom we believe God has gifted for the tasks of ministry.

In the Constitution of the PCUSA we find the following:

As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God's Spirit and governance of God's people. Accordingly, congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit. Ruling elders are so named not because they "lord it over" the congregation (Matt. 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Ruling elders, together with teaching elders, exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationships. When elected by the congregation, they shall serve faithfully as members of the session. When elected as commissioners to higher councils, ruling elders participate and vote with the same authority as teaching elders, and they are eligible for any office.<sup>5</sup>

There are three critical elements here that need to be noted. First, there is a strong Biblical precedent for elders as spiritual leaders. This is not the same as having a priesthood or clerical class that assumes ultimate responsibility for the corporate body. These are people who are selected by those to be governed because they displayed spiritual gifts and sensitivity. They may be people of great charisma or wisdom; they

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 1:12ff.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 16:1ff. Paul offers a long list of greetings to those fellow workers in the faith both men and women.

<sup>5</sup> (G-2.0301) *Book of Order, Presbyterian Church (USA)*, Louisville, KY, 2011 edition. The Constitution of the PCUSA consists of the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*. The *Book of Order* contains the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity (F), the Form of Government (G), the Directory for Worship (W), and the Book of Discipline (D). References to the Form of Government use the form of G-xx.xxxx to refer to chapters, sections, and subsections. The reference here is to the Form of Government, chapter 2, section .0301. Future references to the Constitution will take this form in the notes.



may display courage and conviction in the face of danger; they may have compassion that exhibits itself in the care of widows, orphans or strangers. But they are not of a special class; they are considered ordinary or common people.

Second, the duty of selection remains with the people. There is not a special process by which only some might be considered for the position. There is no secret election that takes place; it is a very open process in which the public participates. In the PCUSA all presbyters, both teaching elders and ruling elders, are chosen and elected in duly-called public meetings and by means of an open vote of those members of the body who will be involved. There is a real sense of democracy within this process; again, this is a hallmark of the Reformed Church.

Third, both teaching elders and ruling elders share in a mutual ministry. There is to be a balance within the church. In a real sense, this is a distinction of office—not of rank. There is to be parity within the courts of the church; there is to be mutual participation within the processes of the church. This is highlighted by the fact that teaching elders and ruling elders and deacons affirm the same ordination vows, except for the name of the office assumed. In essence, all officers of the Church are peers; we share the one Spirit, the one calling, the one hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We also confess, however, that not all people are called for such a position, and that those who are called should be well-prepared to assume the role. We do not choose them lightly, and they should not take their office lightly. Therefore, in the PCUSA we mandate that there be a time of education for those who are to become the spiritual leaders of our church.

## A Mandated Moment

Apart from confirmation, elder education is the only required process of education for adults within the church. Our constitution states the following:

When person have been elected to the ordered ministry of ruling elder or deacon, the session shall provide for a period of study and preparation, after which the session shall examine them as to personal faith; knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church; and the duties of ministry. The session shall also confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the ministry appropriate to the order. If the examination is approved, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation.<sup>6</sup>

That elders elect be educated is mandated—how they are to be educated is not. The foci and methods that are used vary from church to church.

All of this preparation leads to the moment when the elders elect will stand before the congregation to answer the constitutional questions, commonly referred to as the ordination vows:

- a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
- b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?
- c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
- d. Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?
- e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?
- f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?
- g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
- h. Will you **pray for and**<sup>7</sup> seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

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<sup>6</sup> G-2.0402, *Book of Order, Presbyterian Church (USA)* 2011 ed., 28.

<sup>7</sup> The text highlighted here in **bold** was added in the 2011 edition of the Book of Order. That the church has now moved to mandate that elders pray for those in their care is striking for two reasons: one,

- i. Will you be a faithful **ruling** elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in **councils** of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?<sup>8</sup>

Even a cursory glance at those questions should be enough to give one pause as how one would answer them in the first place and then attempt to live them out in the second place. It is not a simple or simplistic commitment that is being called for in the process of officer ordination in the PCUSA.

Imagine if you will, someone answering those questions in the affirmative the very first time he heard them. An elder in the PCUSA related just that experience to me. The first time he had occasion to hear the questions was as they were being asked of him within the service of ordination. He said he felt as if he should raise his hand, stop the service, and get a little more time to think about what he was getting into. Along the way he had not been presented the opportunity to study, to discuss, to debate, and to decide if this was, indeed, what God was asking of him. One can hardly blame him for his hesitancy.

That is why a period of education is required. We do not want people taking office within the church if they have not been given the opportunity to explore the implications thoroughly. Therefore, we mandate preparation.

But we can also see from the example above that the precise course of study is not uniform in all congregations. Some curricula for elder education focus a great deal on the ordination vows and use the constitutional questions as the outline for the entire course of study. Others do not address the questions specifically, but they are included as part of

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why has it taken this long for the church to see this need; and two, one would hope that all officers of the church were already praying for those in their care.

<sup>8</sup> W-4.4003, a-i. *Book of Order, Presbyterian Church (USA)* 2011 ed., 122.

the course of study. Obviously, one would hope they would be covered in some form prior to standing in public and making a vow of commitment.

The reality is that this mandate can be fulfilled in a variety of ways. The exact course of study is left to individual congregations. Some rely heavily on their own manual of operations; others focus more on the constitution of the church; others may include a broad range of resources. We insist that this education take place, but we do not insist on the content of the instruction.

So we have the occasion to teach and learn and, moreover, the opportunity for real change and growth in the process; we see the value in this moment and we expect education to take place. But there are a host of things to consider as we approach this task.

### Diverse Backgrounds and Beliefs

What are some of the factors that need to be considered to ensure that we are effective in what we do with elder education? Let us turn our attention to those now.

It is normal to assume that those who are in positions of leadership within an organization have a great deal of familiarity with that organization; it is not uncommon in business, education, or the military to choose those who have a long background within a particular field to serve in positions of leadership. There is a certain amount of “paying one’s dues” that might be expected before being tapped to lead.

In today’s culture, however, we find that there is a great deal of diversity in those who are assuming the role of leader within the church. Whereas once it was typical that individuals were born, baptized, raised, served, and died within one congregation, or at

least within one denomination, today we can make no assumptions about one's background within the church. We are electing and educating elders that come from a wide array of religious backgrounds.

A recent survey by the Research Services of the Presbyterian Church (USA) reveals the differences between clergy, elders, and members on a number of issues that factor into spiritual leadership; among them, that less than half of those who are serving as elders in the Presbyterian Church (USA) were raised in the Presbyterian Church.<sup>9</sup> Forty-seven percent were raised in the Presbyterian Church (USA) while thirteen percent were raised in a Methodist church, twelve percent were raised in a Baptist church, seven percent were raised in a Roman Catholic Church, and twenty-one percent were raised in another church.<sup>10</sup> It is reasonable to assume that those who have come from other backgrounds have a different understanding and view of spiritual leadership; it is reasonable to assume that they have a different theological background; it is also reasonable to assume that they would have a different understanding of spiritual practices as well. These elders simply do not leave behind everything that they have been taught and practiced through their years of living and worshipping in another tradition. This becomes an important factor when considering how they might be educated to assume leadership within what is, for them, a new church.

Another critical difference that needs to be noted is that of theological orientation between pastors and elders. According to the 2005 snapshot, forty-three percent of elders claimed that their theological orientation was very conservative/conservative; this is a slightly higher percentage than the general membership and almost ten percent higher

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<sup>9</sup> Presbyterian Panel Snapshot of Characteristics of Presbyterians 2005. P.1. Published by Research Services, Presbyterian Church (USA). See APPENDIX SEVEN, page 167.

<sup>10</sup> 2005 Snapshot, 1.

than pastors. There was less difference between those who considered themselves moderate with members, elders, and pastors all being within two percent. There was a greater discrepancy again for those who reported that they were very liberal/liberal; pastors were again about ten percent more likely to say they were very liberal/liberal and specialized clergy were almost twice as likely to identify with this theological orientation.<sup>11</sup> So not only are we faced with differences in religious background, we also discover that there are differences of theological orientation between members, elders, and pastors. Current elders tend to be more conservative than pastors. That distinction must influence both the perspective from which pastors teach and the perspective from which elders elect learn.

There is also diversity in spiritual practices among those who serve as ruling elders and teaching elders. Ruling elders are more likely than regular members to attend worship every week or nearly every week. Ruling elders are likely to pray on a daily basis, although one must also notice that there are about fourteen percent who say they pray only weekly or less than weekly. Meanwhile teaching elders report that they are highly likely to pray every day or at least several times a week; less than three percent of teaching elders report praying only weekly or less than weekly.

The difference in terms of how often ruling elders and teaching elders read the Bible is more glaring. Fifty-four percent of teaching elders report reading the Bible on a daily basis and another thirty-six percent report reading the Bible several times a week. Among ruling elders only twenty percent report reading the Bible daily and only sixteen percent report reading the Bible several times a week. The most surprising statistic here

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<sup>11</sup> 2005 Snapshot, 1.

is that fully fifty percent of ruling elders report reading the Bible less than weekly.<sup>12</sup> It seems as if our ruling elders are not being nourished on the Word of God to the extent that one would hope; the difference here would certainly argue against the kind of mutuality of ministry that is one of the foundations of our Presbyterian system. If the ruling elders of our churches, the leaders who serve alongside our teaching elders, are not engaging the Scriptures on a regular basis, then the influence of the Bible is certainly diminished. The lack of Bible reading by the ruling elders tends to allow the teaching elders reading and listening to the Word to be the “final word” among the congregation; ruling elders and members are not likely to voice questions or concerns if they are unfamiliar with the Bible or do not trust their facility with the Scriptures. If the ruling elders’ voice is not silenced altogether by this lack of connection with the Word, then it is certainly restrained. A lack of depth in the divine conversation would hinder effective spiritual leadership.

The diverse backgrounds and beliefs and spiritual practices of those selected to serve as elders also put an extra burden upon the process. One cannot assume any level of knowledge or practice that mirrors the pastoral leadership; indeed, it might be better to assume that those coming to the preparation process will not have any real familiarity with Reformed theology, Biblical beliefs, or spiritual practices.

### Non-transferable Skills

Steve Eason has noticed several of the issues that also contribute to this thesis. He saw that those who were selected to be elders came from diverse backgrounds. He also noticed that many of the skills that they used in their daily employment did not

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<sup>12</sup> 2005 Snapshot, 2.

necessarily transfer into spiritual leadership.<sup>13</sup> Running a bank is different from guiding a church; teaching first graders is different than leading an adult Sunday School class; serving on the board of a local non-profit agency is not the same as serving on the Mission and Outreach Committee. Yes, there are skills that are necessary in the operation of any organization. Churches need people who can do the books and teach the classes and fix the buildings and a host of others tasks just as they would do in the real world of work. Churches that are not blessed with a skilled talent pool may well struggle at some points along the way.

However, the tendency may often be to elect elders for their skills in the secular world, rather than for their spiritual gifts. How often are bankers chosen to serve on the finance committee? How often are those in the building trades tapped for the property committee? How often are those who work five days a week in a public school asked to teach another class of children on Sunday? In other words, there is something of a tendency to choose leaders within the church to fill positions similar to what they do on a daily basis already. Of course, they probably are good at what they do—that's why they do it. But that does not mean that they should be pigeon-holed into the same tasks when serving the church. Rather than reinforce skills that are already developed, should we not rather attempt to teach and to gain new skills when we take the task of leading the church? Are we all missing an opportunity for growth when we try to transfer our secular occupations into our spiritual vocations? And perhaps most importantly, are we not increasing the likelihood that we will run the church the same way that we run everything else?

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<sup>13</sup> Steve Eason, "Officer Training as a Way to Transform Your Church," Presbyterian Outlook, August 18, 2009. <http://pres-outlook.net/reports-a-resources3/presbyterian-heritage-articles3/9093-officer-training-as-a-way-to-transform-your-church.html> (accessed August 18, 2009).



The reality is that a church is not the same as other organizations; there are differences that must be considered in spiritual leadership that make it spiritual. There are unique skills and gifts that make for effective spiritual leadership. First and foremost among these gifts is a deep conversation with God. Spiritual leadership is not just about performing the tasks that keep the organization running—it is about listening and acting on what it is that we hear from God. God speaks to ruling elders as well as to teaching elders. The depth of the ruling elder's prayer life is as important, if not more so, than the elder's organizational abilities. The sensitivity that the ruling elder has in speaking with God and others plays a more important role than their skill at running a meeting or coordinating an activity. We cannot presume to speak for God if we have not already spent time talking with God.

Spiritual leadership is more about discerning God's will and direction than discussing and deciding on organizational goals. Spiritual leadership is not a skill that we learn but a gift God. We lessen our effectiveness as a church when we think that it should be run like any other organization in the secular world.

Therefore, a strong emphasis on elder education should be on spiritual leadership, not on skill development. It is more important that we address our prayer life than to calculate how our professional skills will assist the congregation. It is a time and occasion to learn to listen to God more deeply than to make sure that we know the organizational chart. It is an opportunity to consider our Rule of Life rather than to review Robert's Rules of Order. It is an opportunity to look at God and our church and ourselves in a new light. It is a chance to learn a whole new set of practices that will support and strengthen the spiritual nature of the task to which we have been called.

## A Small Window

So we have elders elect<sup>14</sup> who have been called and are willing to serve; we have teaching elders who are prepared to teach them something of what it means to guide a congregation in God's ways; we have a constitutional mandate that a time of preparation take place. Everyone involved sees the importance and influence that this process can produce, but the truth of the matter is that we typically have a very small window of opportunity for such education to take place. Busy people leading busy lives have a hard time fitting something else in the schedule; even a small group of elders presents a challenge when one is trying to arrange a mutually agreed upon schedule for a short-term educational experience.

In a survey of churches and elder education programs within the churches of the Presbytery of East Tennessee eight of ten gave fewer than four sessions to the process; these sessions averaged two hours or less in length; so one could assume a maximum of eight hours dedicated to the task of teaching new officers.<sup>15</sup> One congregation used a half-day process that was typically done on a Saturday morning; the advantage here might be ease in scheduling, but the result is still less than four hours of class. Another congregation used a process of one quarter of adult Sunday School time to address the process; that advantage here is that it is using a time that most elders elect have already set aside for church time so that it doesn't meet the same conflicts that occur with other time slots; this was also the congregation that had scheduled the most time for the task. So while there is not set number of hours or session that are required, what we discover is

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<sup>14</sup> "Elder elect" is the term used for those who have been elected by the congregation but have not yet been ordained or installed into office.

<sup>15</sup> From CLERGY SURVEY RESULTS from the Presbytery of East Tennessee. See APPENDIX TWO, page 153.

that the total amount of time devoted to the task seems to be somewhere between two hours and thirteen hours. That does not include time that may be required for outside reading or other assignments. But what it reveals is that we have a small window into which we are trying to address some large issues. One would think given the importance of the task that we would find a way to devote more time to the effort.

There seems to be a connection between time spent on the task and the level of satisfaction and preparation for incoming elders. Of those surveyed, the one church which spent the most time on the task reported the highest level of satisfaction with their process; this congregation uses the Adult Sunday School format in which incoming elders elect are together for thirteen weeks in a weekly class. It is the curriculum that requires the most hours. Of the remainder of those surveyed the satisfaction was either good or average.

This leads to an obvious question: With such an important task at hand, why are we not devoting more time to accomplishing it? What would make us think that we are truly producing serious change when we give the process such a minimum amount of time?

In the literature review chapter we will examine some others who have experimented with expanding their elder education process and the results that they are having. It will not be a surprise that those who are committing more time and attention to the process are more satisfied and successful with their results. There is a connection between the time spent on the task and its effect on those participating. If the window is too small, then we should explore what it means to open it wider; in essence, time is a critical factor in preparing elders elect.

## Manner of Preparation and Operation

Not only is the time spent important; it is also critical to think about the manner in which we carry out the task. The manner in which we prepare will be the manner in which we perform. What we practice as we prepare ourselves for our position of service will be what we continue to practice once we are serving. There should be a strong congruence between the two. If we expect our elders to lead from a deep sense of their spirituality, from a deep conversation with God, then we must spend time and effort in exploring and developing that spirituality. If we hope for our leaders to be spiritual guides, then we need to spend some time in spiritual guidance.

There is a critical question that arises here: Are we trying to teach one way and then operate in another way? If we rely on a heavily didactic approach in our educational process, then will we be setting ourselves up for a much more deliberative mode of operations; if we spend our time teaching rules, then will we end up with rule-keepers? If we teach them to quote chapter and verse of the Book of Order, will we end up with endless polity debates? If we teach them that the church is no different than other organizations, then will we end up operating and looking more and more like other organizations? To put it another way, how closely is the preparation process tied to the operational processes that will ensue? The position taken here is that we cannot prepare one way and then expect to perform in another way; the mode in which we teach is the mode in which we will function.

At least part of our problem in the Presbyterian Church (USA) is the lack of clear guidance for the task at hand. Elder elect are being educated in particular churches by particular teaching elders without any reference to or reliance on guidelines for either the

preparation or the examination processes. We claim that we are preparing elders to serve the entire church, and yet our preparations are very specific to our situations.

### A Powerful, Prayerful Potential

The thesis offered here is that we must change the mode of our preparation so that our elders will operate in a new way. Rather than rehash policy details, worldly skill development, work committee tasks and assignments, the emphasis here will be placed on spiritual formation of elders elect. We will be looking more at prayer than polity. We will be looking more at individual daily practices than group processes. We will be looking more at the relationship between elder and God, rather than the regulations that direct our earthly relations.

The thesis project is entitled *Prayerful Preparation: Elder Education as Spiritual Formation*. In broad strokes this means that instead of elder education as transferring information about the organization, we will be approaching it as an opportunity for spiritual formation for elders in which they will deepen their relationship with God; there will be a decided emphasis on devotion rather than didactics; there will be more emphasis on transformation rather than information. The format of this form of education will be focused on Bible study, daily prayer, and reflection on one's relationship with God. The Bible study component will explore various aspects of Biblical leadership such as call stories, conversions, covenant relations, and the Great Ends of the Church.<sup>16</sup> Each day will present a new Biblical text to read and reflect on as well as questions to guide that

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<sup>16</sup> The Great Ends of the Church are: the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of mankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. (F-1.0304) *Book of Order, Presbyterian Church (USA)*, 2011 ed., 5.

reflection and a place to write those reflections. For those who have not developed a practice of regular time in the Word this will move them in that direction.

The daily prayer format will offer two larger sections of prayers for morning and evening with additional, shorter segments for midday and evening. It is not expected that every person will perform every office of prayer throughout the time of preparation, but it is expected that elders elect will attempt to be consistent with at least some pattern of prayers that might continue forward as they serve.

The reflection process will include not only the written reflections that accumulate through the week, but will also include time during a weekly gathering time in which we will together discuss and engage the questions and insights that have arisen.

The weekly gathering will also include a service of prayer, setting the tone for our time together. It will be less like a lecture and more like sharing, less like an authority dispensing answers and more like a group wrestling together with God. The goal is not to get them to cover a certain amount of material, but to engage the God who has called us and who guides us as we seek to follow as the church.

The hope here is that ruling elders will learn a new model of leadership-- one that relies on a growing relationship with God exhibited by prayerful practices. The gifts, skills and abilities that the elders elect already possess will still be used in their service to the church, but they will be used within the context of a deep personal relationship with God. The hope here is that our elders will be enabled and empowered to lead the Church into more faithful ministry and mission. Just as Biblical leaders lead from the depths of an intense relationship with God, so too will our elders work from that base.

## The Setting

This project will take place within Mars Hill Presbyterian Church. Mars Hill Presbyterian is an old church with a rich history. It was founded in 1823, and is one of the oldest churches in McMinn County, Tennessee. It is situated on lot number nineteen of the original plat map of Athens, Tennessee, the county seat. Mars Hill meets in an historic sanctuary that dates back to 1878. There is a rich sense of tradition and history in this congregation.

In many ways Mars Hill is typical of many small PCUSA churches. The membership is currently 180 members with typical Sunday worship attendance of seventy-five to one hundred. The membership tends to be older, well-educated, and middle to upper class; in other words, they display the general demographics of most PCUSA members. There is a mix of families that have been associated with the church for generations as well as new families. There is a mix of young and old, although as with many PCUSA congregations, children, youth, and young adults are not the majority.

The order of worship is traditional with a recently upgraded pipe organ and a small, but talented, choir. The congregation uses a worship bulletin, a hymnal, and a pew Bible for worship. The church follows the liturgical year during the Advent/Christmas and Lenten/Easter cycles. At other times of the year there may be sermon series designed towards themes or special emphases such as mission, discipleship, or stewardship. Most would categorize our worship as “reverent.”

The congregation has a civic mission orientation that is characterized by members living out their faith within the community as responsible citizens.<sup>17</sup> Church members

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<sup>17</sup> Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley and William McKinney, editors. *Handbook for Congregational Studies*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 29-30.

can be found on many community boards such as the United Way, the Hope Center (a shelter for battered women), the Good Faith Clinic (a free clinic for those who do not have health care), the Friends of the Library, the School Board, and others. Those serving on these boards do not tend to draw attention to themselves nor their acts of ministry. One lives by example, but a quiet example is preferred. Neither the minister nor the members are prone to discuss politics as part of congregational life; each is expected to participate politically, but without a great deal of religious instruction in that regard.

The church is governed by a twelve member Session with elders serving three-year rotating terms of service. The Session is elected by the members of the congregation and elders are nominated with an eye to being representative of the whole congregation's membership. There is an attempt to maintain a gender balance on the Session, although this is not proscribed in any official documents. The Session meets monthly to conduct the business of the church. The Session oversees the work of the various church committees: Christian Education, Congregational Support, Mission and Outreach, Property, Stewardship, and Worship. Session members are expected to serve as leaders on those committees.

Thus, ruling elders serving on the session are expected both to be the spiritual leaders of the congregation while also fulfilling the administrative roles connected with their committees. There is an expectation that the elders be able to do all the necessary tasks needed for the church's ongoing operation. In addition to committee work, ruling elders also serve as ushers during the worship service which includes greeting worshippers, collecting and counting the offerings, depositing the offering, and checking



that everything has been turned off and locked at the end of worship. It is easy to see that service on the Session is both a high honor and also a good bit of work.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DAILY, DISCIPLINED, DIALOGUE OF DEVOTION

We live in the midst of a generation that is seeking something spiritual, although “spiritual, but not religious” seems to be the watchword for many. There is something within us that bristles at the idea that we should be disciplined in any way. Dallas Willard has noted that we have bought into the notion that we should be radically free and anything that would hinder that is to be rejected; in fact, it might not even seem to be “natural.”<sup>1</sup> This idea of freedom and our right to it is pervasive within our culture. Willard states that “the Western world at large, not merely philosophers and scholars, is now firmly prejudiced against disciplinary activities as part of the religious life.”<sup>2</sup> Even within the church there is a tendency to be wary of anything that might be construed either as “works righteousness” or life-draining “legalism.” In the Presbyterian Church (USA) one rarely hears the term “discipline” unless it is in connection with proceedings of the church against leaders who have run afoul of their duties. The idea that “discipline” could be a positive, life-altering experience is not readily understood or accepted.

But there have been several authors who have trumpeted the notion of “discipline” as not only a valuable element of our Christian spiritual heritage, but as the means by which might truly become the spiritual people that God wants us to be.<sup>3</sup> If it is so for the broader membership of the church, how much more so should it be true for the church’s leaders? Discipline is how we develop our discipleship.

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<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 133.

<sup>2</sup> Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 135.

<sup>3</sup> See Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* or Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines* or Thompson’s *Soul Feast* as examples.

A disciplined life could well be the way to describe the Biblical model of those who are to serve in spiritual leadership as elders within the church. The Biblical image we have from Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus reveals a sense of order, balance, moderation, and integrity. Paul issues cautions about various vices which would bring discredit to the church; those called to be elders are not to be living in such a way that their lives raise questions or doubts about the goodness and faithfulness of the Christian witness. Those called to serve are, instead, to be examples of the virtues one would expect of religious leaders. In Titus 1:8 we hear a short list of virtues for the elders of the church: an elder is "hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined."<sup>4</sup> In other words, it is not just what one does, but the character of the one who does it. It is not only the means by which one does something, but also the manner in which it is done. For those who are seeking to grow spiritually, and perhaps especially for those who are assuming the greater responsibilities of leadership, reflecting on these virtues and traits is a way in which one might grow in grace and faith. Given the high ideals for leadership in the Biblical witness, one should see that the spiritual discipline involved is a challenge as well as a chance to grow. As one examines the balance, order and discipline, one will become more balanced, orderly, and disciplined. It bears repeating that in the Christian tradition spirituality is intimately connected with discipline.

Prayer is the heart of Christian spiritual discipline; as Richard Foster states so clearly: "Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us."<sup>5</sup> It may take place in many forms according to the person praying; it may be silent or spoken; it may be

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<sup>4</sup> Titus 1:8.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Revised edition. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 33.

moving or still; it may be indoors or out. But the conversation between the Christian and God is the center of the relationship. Prayer is essential.

The kind of prayer envisioned here is not simply the crying out that comes from a sudden shock or a dire distress. It is not a cry to God that only comes on those days when one cannot handle the situation alone. This prayer is a daily conversation.

The kind of prayer envisioned here is not a random or haphazard occasion to let God know something is happening. This prayer is a discipline that gives order and structure to life.

The kind of prayer envisioned here is not one-sided. There are those who feel as if they are talking to themselves whenever they pray, as if they keep talking but they think God is not listening. This prayer is a dialogue.

The kind of prayer envisioned here is not just a way of letting God know our needs. It is not focused on whether we are getting what we want out of God. This prayer is devotional and intensely relational.

We will look first at some of the difficulties we have with prayer. Then we will explore how a daily, disciplined, dialogue of devotion can contribute to our spiritual growth.

### Difficulties

If prayer is universal as Rice suggests, then why is it that so many people seem to have such a difficult time with it?<sup>6</sup> What hinders us in our attempts to pray in our world today? There are a variety of hindrances, some internal and some external.

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<sup>6</sup> Howard Rice, *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 71.

From a solid Reformed standpoint, Calvin would say that the simple answer is “total depravity.” Calvin begins his book on prayer by reminding the reader of our spiritual state: “From those matters so far discussed, we clearly see how destitute and devoid of all good things man is, and how he lacks all aids to salvation. Therefore, if he seeks resources to succor him in his need, he must go outside himself and get them elsewhere.”<sup>7</sup> We are not able to pray by ourselves; it is only when God grants us to pray that we are able to do so. Calvin will also claim that God, indeed, desires to do so.

Yet even if God will grant us the ability to do so, people struggle with praying. Richard Foster says, “We today yearn for prayer and hide from prayer. We are attracted to it and repelled by it... We experience the agony of prayerlessness.”<sup>8</sup> We intend to pray. We want to pray. But the sense that we are “prayerless” continues.

That is not something that is only a contemporary problem. Andrew Murray, the great 19<sup>th</sup> Century theologian and pastor, claimed that: “Prayer is indeed the pulse of the spiritual life. It is the great means of bringing to the minister and people the blessing and power of heaven. Persevering and believing prayer means a strong and an abundant life.”<sup>9</sup> In a day in which the church seems to be losing its power and presence in the public life, Murray would surely guide us to examine our prayer life as a critical component of the issue. One may well ask whether our generation is suffering from “prayerlessness” as did Murray’s.

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<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), (III.xx.1), 850.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 27.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Murray, *Andrew Murray on Prayer*. (New Kensington, PA.: Whitaker House, 1998), 150.

Even our clergy are not sure about what to do with prayer. It is not necessarily an expectation for them in our day; or so Benson claims:

But once the Church crossed the pond and entered the New World, the whole notion of the responsibility for offering the daily prayers, at least as far as the American Protestant world was concerned, got left behind somehow. These things were still in the prayer books but not on the radar. Since the fourteenth century, we Protestants by and large do not even expect professional clergy to say the prayers anymore.<sup>10</sup>

How did we get to be “prayerless?” In a culture that has everything, how could we not learn how to pray? Paul Miller strikes a chord when he says that “American culture is probably the hardest place in the world to learn to pray. We are so busy that when we slow down to pray, we find it uncomfortable. We prize accomplishments, production. But prayer is nothing but talking to God. It feels useless, as if we are wasting time. Every bone in our body screams, ‘Get to work.’”<sup>11</sup>

Miller offers here a critical insight. Prayer may be difficult for us because we are so busy being driven by others things—especially work. We live at a pace that drives us externally rather than internally. We are slaves to the clock rather than servants of God. Indeed, we do value achievement and accomplishment. Prayer, like worship, is not something that we can calculate in the Gross Domestic Product, and things that do not improve the bottom line are usually discarded in our culture.

Miller goes on to say that “One of the subtlest hindrances to prayer is probably the most pervasive. In the broader culture and in our churches, we prize intellect, competency, and wealth. Because we can do life without God, praying seems nice but

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Benson, *In Constant Prayer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 15.

unnecessary.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, in the modern mindset God is no longer required nor valued for many.

Jamison poses a critical question for us and our culture: “A powerful question to ask at this point is: who sets your agenda? Who sets your agenda minute by minute, from day to day? Who sets your agenda in the long run?”<sup>13</sup> If we are honest, then we recognize that most of our agenda is being set by the corporate world of work. With the creation of machines that never stop, we, too, plugged into the idea that our work never stops. With the onset of technological advances we now find it ever more difficult to detach. Work finds us in virtually every place we go. The corporate world works on us. Everything is valued according to a contribution to the bottom line.

Miller and others have noted that we have a real tendency towards being utilitarian in our culture. Everything has to “work” and to work well to be valued. Miller says that we get irritated with prayer when it seems to us that it is not working. Miller describes the experience this way:

The most common frustration is the activity of praying itself. We last for about fifteen seconds, and out of nowhere the day’s to-do list pops up and our minds are off on a tangent. We catch ourselves and, by sheer force of the will, go back to praying. Before we know it, it has happened again. Instead of praying, we are doing a confused mix of wandering and worrying. Then the guilt sets in. *Something must be wrong with me. Other Christians don’t seem to have this trouble praying.* After five minutes we give up, saying, “I’m no good at this. I might as well get some work done.”<sup>14</sup>

While the author agrees with the general statement, at least part of the problem will be in our understanding of prayer as an “activity,” as if it is just something else that we are “to-do.” If our life is driven by the to-do list, then prayer tends to be another slot in the

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<sup>12</sup> Miller, *A Praying Life*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Jamison, *Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 81.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, *A Praying Life*, 14.

schedule or another item for the day that must either be done or not done. Instead of a conversation it is reduced to a check mark. This notion that prayer is an “activity” is not the way that Jesus prayed, nor the way that he taught us to pray, nor the vision of prayer that is being offered here.

If prayer is simply an activity, then our mindset changes as well. We want to master our activities; we want to succeed and achieve high efficiency with our activities. Richard Foster says, “our problem is that we assume prayer is something to master the way we master algebra or auto mechanics.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, we expect to master such things, and as is so often the case, once we have mastered the activity we move on to something else. It holds little for us once we have mastered it.

But that perspective hinders us in other ways as well. What if we sense that we cannot master prayer? Foster says that we have “the notion—almost universal among us modern high achievers—that we have to have everything ‘just right’ in order to pray.”<sup>16</sup> So just as having it “mastered” might be a hindrance to prayer, not having it mastered may hinder prayer as well. People may be hesitant to pray for fear that they are not “up to speed” on this practice. The best answer to that is fairly simple, suggests Dom Chapman: “Pray as you can, not as you can’t.”<sup>17</sup>

Another difficulty to prayer is our continual state of distraction. We are faced with a constant bombardment of sensory stimulation. Everyone and everything is calling out for our attention. The person who is able to handle this load of information is considered a “multi-tasker” and valued for their production. We are being conditioned to

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<sup>15</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 7.



respond ever more quickly to what is coming at us, so that we can move on to the next item.

Sr. Joan Chittister reminds us that “consciousness of God is perpetual prayer.”<sup>18</sup>

In a world of unending distraction is it possible to keep a consciousness of God amidst all that is going on? Esther de Waal reminds us of what Simone Weil said, “Absolute attention is prayer.”<sup>19</sup> De Waal cites Mary Sarton who used Weil’s statement in her teaching: “I have used the sentence often in talking about poetry to students, to suggest that is one looks long enough at almost anything, looks with absolute attention at a flower, a stone, the bark of a tree, grass, snow, a cloud, something like revelation takes place. Something is ‘given...’”<sup>20</sup> But in a world where our attentions are spread so thin, how does one find a way to give absolute attention to anything?

In a world so driven by din and distraction, one might think the church would offer an alternative. One might think that the church would resist the tendency to add to the Kingdom of Noise, as C. S. Lewis called it.<sup>21</sup> But that may not be the case. Robert Benson goes on to comment on how the modern church has gotten away from this basic office of ministry. We have plenty of all kinds of things—choirs, art, mailing lists, websites, parking lots, study groups, buses, lock-ins, rock-and-roll bands—but we are missing this critical element. Benson states:

What we do not have so much of sometimes, it seems to me, is the depth of spirit and of devotion and of piety—now, there is a scary word—that marked the life of the faithful in the hundreds and thousands of years before us, the centuries that

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<sup>18</sup> Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St Benedict Today* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 31.

<sup>19</sup> Esther de Waal. *A Celtic Way of Prayer: The Recovery of the Religious Imagination* (New York: Image Books, 1997), 196.

<sup>20</sup> De Waal, *A Celtic Way of Prayer*, 196.

<sup>21</sup> Miller, *A Praying Life*, 15-16.

produced the Church we built our buildings and programs around in the first place.

It is worth noting, I believe, that this tradition of daily prayer is one of the practices that our modern Church does not do that the ancient Church did. We preach sermons, study the Scriptures, gather to worship on the Sabbath, teach our children the faith, and fellowship with one another—but we do not say our prayers.<sup>22</sup>

Calvin reminds us that we have ample reason to pray. We are blessed more than we realize and certainly more than we stop to reflect upon. God is ready and willing to offer those resources to those who will seek them. Calvin compares God to an “overflowing spring.” To know this and not to pray would be akin to neglecting “a treasure, buried and hidden in the earth, after it had been pointed out to him.”<sup>23</sup> He goes on to say that prayer is the means by which we reach the riches that God has in store. It is in prayer that we request God’s riches; Calvin says, “Therefore, we see that to us nothing is promised to be expected from the Lord, which we are not also bidden to ask of him in prayers.”<sup>24</sup>

We have reason to pray. We have a need to pray. Perhaps our greatest difficulty is that we have lost our pattern to pray. When speaking of the diminished life of prayer in the church today, Phyllis Tickle says “and little could have been more detrimental, more enervating, to the whole body of Christ on earth than the loss of those diurnal rhythms of praise and thanksgiving by all believers.”<sup>25</sup> She is speaking of the Divine Offices or the Liturgy of the Hours.<sup>26</sup> Without some pattern of prayer, it becomes a rather happenstance appendage to our daily schedules. The fact that millions of so-called

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<sup>22</sup> Benson, *In Constant Prayer*, 61.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (III.xx.1), 850.

<sup>24</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (III.xx.2), 851.

<sup>25</sup> Phyllis Tickle from the introduction to Benson’s *In Constant Prayer*, xi.

<sup>26</sup> *The Divine Hours* is the title given to a series written by Tickle to help recapture this discipline of prayer. This pattern of prayer has been known by many names such as the Liturgy of the Hours, the Daily Offices, and fixed-hour prayer among others.

“practicing Christians” have no discernable discipline of prayer is ample evidence of how easy it is to separate speech from practice. It has become very easy to “be Christian,” although that may or may not include any practice of prayer.

But Calvin goes on to expound on why it is that we should be continually in prayer:

The reason why Paul enjoins us both to pray and to give thanks without ceasing [I Thess. 5:17-18; cf. I Tim. 2:1,8] is, of course, that he wishes all men to lift up their desires to God, with all possible constancy, at all times, in all places, and in all affairs and transactions, to expect all things from him, and give him praise for all things, since he offers us unfailing reasons to praise and pray.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, prayer is to be continual.

There may be many difficulties in prayer. There may be more difficulties than those that have been noted here. But the church, especially the church’s leaders, must return to prayer if the church is to be the vital Body of Christ in this world that God expects. It is a difficulty, but also an opportunity.

Benson issues a challenge to the modern church to once again take up the daily discipline of prayer. His own words bear repeating:

We are called to pray the prayer that has been prayed without ceasing by God’s faithful for six thousand years. The fact that it is so faintly heard in our time is not a function of its irrelevance; it is a function of our ignorance.

I cannot help myself; here comes a pronouncement. ...

I am increasingly convinced that if the Church is to live, to actually be alive, one of the reasons, maybe the most important and maybe even the only reason, will be because we have taken up our place in the line of the generations of faithful who came before us. It will be because we pray the prayer that Christ himself prayed when he walked among us and now longs to pray through us.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (III.xx.28), 890.

<sup>28</sup> Benson, *In Constant Prayer*, 72.

## Daily

What Benson has discovered anew is an ancient practice that goes back to the Psalms and beyond. The biblical reference is Psalm 119:164: “Seven times a day I praise You for Your righteous rules” (ESV). Whether the pattern was present before the Psalm was written or the pattern resulted from it matters little; prayers were part of their daily experience. Each day was punctuated by prayer.

There was a fairly set pattern that grew from this. Benson says that “Taking their cue from the psalmist, the Hebrew people developed a set of daily liturgical offices of prayer. These little prayer services were to be said at specific times of the day, or specific hours, if you will: daybreak, before the workday began, noon, midafternoon, sundown, before bed, and midnight.”<sup>29</sup> Further attention will be given to the pattern of offices below, but the critical point here is that this is a daily practice, set within the context of our typical, ordinary days.

Calvin knew that the conversation with God was to be ongoing. Indeed, Calvin entitles his treatment of the subject as “Prayer, Which Is the Chief Exercise of Faith, and from Which we Daily Receive God’s Benefits.”<sup>30</sup> We must not underestimate his emphasis on this being the “chief exercise of faith.” Just as we exercise our bodies if we are to maintain a state of health and vigor; we must exercise our souls and faith if we are to maintain our spiritual health as well.

The problem most people have with the notion that prayer is something ordinary derives from their ideas that spirituality has to do only with the extraordinary. A common conception says that to be spiritual means some form of escape from the

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<sup>29</sup> Benson, *In Constant Prayer*, 20.

<sup>30</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (III, xx:1), 850.

routines of daily life. Joan Chittister captures this well when she says, “But just about nobody I have ever met however, really thinks it is easily possible. Spirituality, we have all learned somewhere, is something I have to leave where I am in order to find it.”<sup>31</sup> She continues, “But as the ancient story demonstrates, if we are not spiritual where we are and as we are, we are not spiritual at all.”<sup>32</sup>

Others echo this sentiment. In the preface to *Celebration of Discipline* Foster reminds us that “healthy prayer necessitates frequent experiences of the common, earthly, run-of-the-mill variety. Like walks, and talks, and good wholesome laughter.”<sup>33</sup> Those are not always the types of elements that one expects in a manual about prayer, but they are helpful to keep us grounded when addressing a subject that can often lead to the esoteric and extreme. He restates the thought in *Prayer* this way, “To believe that God can reach us and bless us in the ordinary junctures of daily life is the stuff of prayer.”<sup>34</sup>

Even a mystical thinker the likes of Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, said that “reality is to be found not in the pure and the lasting but in the whole of man, not in ecstasy beyond the world of the senses but in the hallowing of the everyday.”<sup>35</sup> Buber recognized that we are creatures living daily lives and that in that daily life the Divine is present. He would agree that our goal is not the “spiritual exercises, abstinence, and recollection” that are used by those who make those a means to their own end, but to be open and ready for the Presence within each moment of our mundane, run-of-the-mill day.

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<sup>31</sup> Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, xii.

<sup>34</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 73.

Many on the spiritual quest desire a soaring spiritual experience of majestic mystery. What we often experience is far from that. Benson has a great image for it: “daily prayer is more like weeding a flower bed for the third time this month than it is some divine and mystical experience ... the office has a kind of mundane, everyday sort of feeling. There is a blessed ordinariness to it. The daily office is not called *daily* for nothing, you know.”<sup>36</sup> He punctuates this line of thought with this memorable turn of phrase: “it helps to remember that liturgy is the work of the people, not the magic wand of God.”<sup>37</sup>

All of this is keeping with the wisdom that St. Benedict offered long ago: “*ora et labora*” which means prayer and work. It is the stuff of daily life. Brother Benet Tvetden tells us that “the Benedictine manner is ordinary.”<sup>38</sup> Here is a clear statement of which Benedict himself would have been proud. It is short, simple, direct, and clear. It also focuses on the fact that Benedict himself thought he was writing a rule for beginners; this was not intended to be some elite, erudite treatise for the educated. It was an approach to living daily life, not achieving states of spiritual nirvana.

In the secret seminary in which Dietrich Bonhoeffer taught, he wanted to insure that his pupils developed a life of prayer that engaged all of life. He was another who understood that prayer and spirituality are intimately connected with those things that constitute our daily living. Bonhoeffer told his students:

We pray for the big things and forget to give thanks for the ordinary, small (and yet not so small) gifts. How can God entrust great things to one who will not thankfully receive from Him the little things? If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even where there is not

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<sup>36</sup> Benson, *In Constant Prayer*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> Benson, *In Constant Prayer*, 57.

<sup>38</sup> Br. Benet Tvetden, OSB. *How to Be a Monastic and Not Leave Your Day Job: An Invitation to the Oblate Life*, (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006), 9.

great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith and difficulty; if on the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so paltry and petty, so far from what we expected, then we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow according to the measure and riches which are there for us all in Jesus Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Bonhoeffer sounds much like Benedict or perhaps Brother Lawrence when he explores the connection of daily prayer and work:

Thus the prayer of the Christian reaches beyond its set time and extends into the heart of his work. It includes the whole day, and in doing so, it does not hinder the work; it promotes it, affirms it, and lends it meaning and joy. Thus every word, every work, every labor of the Christian becomes a prayer; not in the unreal sense of a constant turning away from the task to be done, but in a real breaking through the hard 'it' to the gracious Thou.<sup>40</sup>

Bonhoeffer alludes to the language of Buber which will be explored in greater depth below. True spirituality is about the integration of prayer and work, not their separation. The spiritual masters have all understood this. Those who are marketing spirituality today have not.

Given that we are to seek and find the spiritual in each day, there are some ways to approach the beginning and end the day that assist greatly in seeing God in the midst of the mundane and run-of-the-mill events that fill our days.

Many in our culture that has divorced prayer from work do not face the day with any sense of excitement; it is, after all, another day of work. But Bonhoeffer tried to get his students to see it differently; he said, "For Christians the beginning of the day should not be burdened and oppressed with the besetting concerns for the day's work. At the threshold of the new day stands the Lord who made it. All the darkness and distraction of the dreams of the night retreat before the clear light of Jesus Christ and his wakening

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<sup>39</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*. Trans. John Doberstein. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1954), 29.

<sup>40</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 71.

Word.<sup>41</sup> That is not exactly the way most in our culture start the day. It may not even be the common experience of Christians.

Bonhoeffer also knew that we are going to spend parts of our days alone and parts of our days together. This is routine for us. But how we handle these common experiences of the “day alone and the day together” to use Bonhoeffer’s phrase, can make a real impact on the rest of our daily life. The “time alone” was meant to be used for spiritual growth that could then be placed in the service of others:

Since meditation on the Scriptures, prayer, and intercession are a service we owe and because the grace of God is found in this service, we should train ourselves to set apart a regular hour for it, as we do for every other service we perform. This is not ‘legalism’; it is orderliness and fidelity. For most people the early morning will prove to be the best time. We have a right to this time, even prior to the claims of other people, and we may insist upon having it as completely undisturbed quiet time despite all external difficulties. For the pastor it is an indispensable duty and his whole ministry will depend on it. Who can really be faithful in great things if he has not learned to be faithful in the things of daily life?<sup>42</sup>

Bonhoeffer would suggest setting aside the morning hours for such time alone. Others would agree. For many who do keep a daily pattern of prayer, morning is often the hour of choice.

The end of the day is also a useful time for prayer and reflection. It offers us the chance to look back on the days’ events and see God’s presence in the midst of it. Foster has a wonderful chapter on the Prayer of Examen in his book *Prayer*. This prayer is a request to let God’s Spirit examine us and teach us what we might have learned through the day. This is a prayer that we need, and yet, it has fallen out of practice even amidst a culture that spends an incredible amount of time searching itself for our inner dynamics.

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<sup>41</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 43.

<sup>42</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 87.



But the difference is that we don't want someone else to examine us—we want to do it ourselves, and we only want to know the results ourselves. That is a far cry from the biblical plea in Psalm 139:1 – “Yahweh, you examine me and know me.”<sup>43</sup>

It is here at the end of the day that another point of St. Benedict's wisdom is especially appropriate. In the Rule he advises us by saying “day by day, remind yourself that you are going to die.”<sup>44</sup> Day by day we are moving closer to that event. Day by day we live our lives knowing that it is coming. When one remembers that, then the ordinary doesn't seem so dull.

Thomas Merton captures the need for daily prayer in the following:

There must be a time of day when the man who makes plans forgets his plans, and acts as if he had no plans at all. There must be a time of day when the man who has to speak falls very silent. And his mind forms no more propositions, and he asks himself: Did they have a meaning? There must be a time when the man of prayer goes to pray as if it were the first time in his life he had ever prayed, when the man of resolutions puts his resolutions aside as if they had all been broken, and he learns a different wisdom: Distinguishing the sun from the moon, the stars from the darkness, the sea from the dry land, and the night sky from the shoulder of a hill.<sup>45</sup>

The different wisdom of which he speaks is found in the every day. In the daily course of our lives we are given graces from God that form us into the people of prayer, the spiritual people that God intends and that we desire to be.

### Disciplined

While there are ample spiritual opportunities in every day, there is something that can be done from the human side of the equation. We can approach this spiritual quest

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<sup>43</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 27.

<sup>44</sup> St. Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. Ed. Timothy Frye, OSB. (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), (4:47), 13.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Merton. *No Man Is an Island*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1978), 260.

with disciplined practices. As Howard Rice says, “discipline in the Christian life is not a luxury.”<sup>46</sup> Foster reminds us that spiritual disciplines are not just for saints and those with special graces; they are in fact for everyone to be used within the normal relationships of life.<sup>47</sup> Not all disciplines are for all disciples; each must find the practices that best speak to his or her life. There is no one size fits all discipline. But all benefit from some form of discipline consistently practiced.

Some disciplines have proven critical to Christian growth through the years; among the most important through history have been the disciplines of prayer and Bible study. We may see these two disciplines as the sides of our conversation with God. God speaks to us through the words of Scripture in many and varied ways; some would say that especially in the Psalms we find expressed the widest range of human emotions and desires. Prayer becomes the conversation in which we both listen and speak; prayer’s language in also varied.

For our present purposes the focus will be on the discipline of daily prayer. Here we find a historical, theological, and traditional foundation for discipline. In this we are not alone; indeed other faiths have also incorporated the discipline of daily prayer in some ways. Phyllis Tickle states:

From their earliest moments, the three monotheistic faith of Abraham—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—have all shared certain common assumptions about, and disciplines of, religious and spiritual formation. All three appoint one day each week as sacred unto God. All three require tithing. Each encouraged spiritual pilgrimage. All three govern themselves according to the rhythms of a liturgical year, and each teaches the uses of fasting at appointed seasons in either the cycles of physical time or of a believer’s individual courses. Most significantly for our

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<sup>46</sup> Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 186.

<sup>47</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 6.

purposes here, however, all three have, from their very inception, assumed the practice of fixed-hour prayer as part and parcel of the observant life.<sup>48</sup>

It is ironic that there are many Christians in our culture today that accuse the followers of Islam of being “godless,” and yet they do not come any where near approaching the discipline of daily prayer that Muslims keep on a regular basis regardless of place or activity. Maintaining a discipline of prayer is not something new or unusual; it is in keeping with the age-old traditions of the church. As Br. Benet Tvetden reminds us, “[it] is not like taking on a religion separate from the one to which a person already belongs.”<sup>49</sup> The unusual side is that we are now living in a culture that has set prayer aside from so much of its daily life.

For many, prayer has become a personal private matter that happens when it seems needed or feels right. Scott McKnight has observed that most Christians only pray *in* the church; by which he means they pray when the congregation is gathered to worship, but they do not pray *with* the church as the church maintains a regular discipline of prayer.<sup>50</sup> This idea of praying *in* the church but not *with* the church becomes something of a mantra for McKnight. There is a difference, too, in the nature of these two different types of prayers. Praying *in* the church is all about praying what is on one’s heart and mind; it tends to be spontaneous; it tends to be done in isolation; it tends to be done only when the Spirit moves. For many today, this is considered the most authentic form of prayer; written prayers or the prayers that have been offered by others are suspect.

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<sup>48</sup> Phyllis Tickle from the introduction to Scott McKnight’s *Praying with the Church: Following Jesus Daily, Hourly, Today* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006), ix.

<sup>49</sup> Tvetden, *How to Be a Monastic*, 8.

<sup>50</sup> McKnight, *Praying With the Church*, 1.

In contrast to this privatized version is the idea of praying *with* the church. This is the discipline of praying together the hours or offices of the church. It goes by many names “liturgical prayer, fixed-hour prayers, the Divine Office, the divine hours, the hours of prayer, or the *opus Dei*” (Latin for “the work of God”).<sup>51</sup> This discipline of praying *with* the church is what McKnight and others like Benson and Tickle are seeking to recapture in our contemporary setting.

This kind of prayer does not necessarily come easy—that is why it is considered a discipline. Chittister puts it beautifully when she says, “To pray only when it suits us is to want God on our terms. To pray only when it is convenient is to make the God-life a very low priority in a list of better opportunities. To pray only when it feels good is to court total emptiness when we most need to be filled. The hard fact is that nobody finds time for prayer. The time must be taken.”<sup>52</sup>

Part of the difficulty of a disciplined prayer life is that there is a time commitment. We moderns tend to measure our lives by the clock. We live in a world that is digitally divided into discreet sequential segments that are then filled with our prioritized activities. McKnight relates this perspective well when he says:

But you and I today, in the twenty-first century, fall into the idea that time is something measured by a clock—when we get to work and when we end work, when we get up and when we go to bed. Or perhaps we measure time by when we eat—breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We can too easily become ‘time-clock humans’ or even ‘meal-driven people’ by how our time is regulated. Is there another way? There is: That other way is to let the hours of prayer shape our days. The blessings of life that enter most deeply into our soul do not come by our finding more free time or more leisure. Those blessings enter the soul when we let our soul rhythms, the sacred rhythms of prayer, shape the structure of our day.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> McKnight, *Praying with the Church*, 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily*, 31.

<sup>53</sup> McKnight, *Praying with the Church*, 36.

Even teaching elders have issues with how to use time. Eugene Peterson tells of how we use the calendar, and thereby, the clock, as a guard against intrusions into our preplanned ideas of what to do with our time. He says that our appointment calendar is the way for us to escape the trivial, meaningless, and mundane elements of our “jobs” so that we can actually find the time for spiritual growth: “It is more effective than a protective secretary, it is less expensive than a retreat house. It is the one thing everyone in our society accepts without cavil as authoritative.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, our culture’s emphasis on planning both drives our over-extended schedules, but could also be the secret to saving time for the spiritual life. Peterson goes on to say that he can have the time to do most anything and to preclude other external commitments with a simple phrase: “My appointment calendar will not permit it.”<sup>55</sup> There is one caveat to Peterson’s plan, however; he says, “The trick, of course, is to get to the calendar before anyone else does.”<sup>56</sup> The purpose of a disciplined schedule of prayer is that it is one way to make sure that prayer is on the calendar. Without that discipline, it is more difficult for prayer to be part of our daily lives.

The Daily Offices, called by whatever name, are a way that places this priority firmly in our view. The offices have been part of the churches life for centuries. They present a regular schedule of prayer at set times of the day. The traditional offices are:

Night prayer – Vigils  
Waking up prayer – Lauds  
Prayers for the beginning of work – Prime  
Giving-thanks prayers n mid-morning – Terce  
Noon-day prayer of commitment – Sext  
Mid-afternoon prayer – None

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<sup>54</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 22.

<sup>55</sup> Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 22.

<sup>56</sup> Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 23.

Evening prayer of stillness – Vespers  
Going-to-sleep prayer of trust – Compline<sup>57</sup>

These are still the offices that are kept in most monasteries. The times may differ in detail, but the overall pattern of prayer throughout the day is the same. This is one possible discipline that would assist those who desire to do Paul's admonition that we pray without ceasing.<sup>58</sup>

For some the maintenance of the Divine Offices seemed to be too close to rote prayers against which Jesus had cautioned.<sup>59</sup> The Reformers were not inclined to keep much from the monastic practices, and repeating prayers and Psalms on such a schedule was not something that they wanted to stress. Even Calvin, however, could not avoid this notion of a daily discipline. Calvin addresses prayer at regular times towards the end of his lengthy chapter on prayer in these words:

But although it has already been stated above that, lifting up our hearts, we should ever aspire to God and pray without ceasing, still, since our weakness is such that it has to be supported by many aids, and our sluggishness such that it needs to be goaded, it is fitting each one of us should set apart certain hours for this exercise. Those hours should not pass without prayer, and during them all the devotion of the heart should be completely engaged in it. These are: when we rise in the morning, before we begin daily work, when we sit down to a meal, when by God's blessing we have eaten, when we are getting ready to retire.<sup>60</sup>

In other words, Calvin, while not proposing the monastic offices, is still recommending that prayer permeate the day at regular intervals. In fact, if one prays as Calvin directs both before and following meals, in addition to the other appropriate times for prayer, then one would be praying even more frequently than proscribed by the monastic offices.

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<sup>57</sup> Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 225.

<sup>58</sup> I Thessalonians 5:17.

<sup>59</sup> Matthew 6:7.

<sup>60</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (III.xx.50), 917-918.

Still, Calvin cautioned against the dangers of public prayer, but he also saw something of value in such offices. Calvin says, “For this reason, certain hours, indifferent to God, but necessary for men’s convenience, are agreed upon and appointed to provide for the accommodation of all, and for everything to be done ‘decently and in order’ in the church, according to Paul’s statement [I Cor. 14:40].”<sup>61</sup>

The object is not to install some drudgery that we have to complete, lest we not be seen as spiritual. The pattern is not simply for rigidity and rigor; it is a way of giving shape to the day that is life-giving. There is a flow in all of this; de Waal says. “the liturgical pattern of the monastic daily offices creates a life that is ‘structured, disciplined, repetitive, supremely orderly.’”<sup>62</sup> This is in sharp contrast to the deadline driven, digitized 24/7 world of our corporate, consumer culture. She continues by saying:

To lose this is a great impoverishment, for it denies the balance that a holistic way of life brings—due recognition given to the needs of body, mind, and spirit, so that we find time for work, for study to keep the mind alive, but above all proper time for prayer. Without this I know that I would probably become either exhausted, or lethargic, unhealthy, diseased.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, de Waal’s concern is that she would become as much of our culture is living today. Discipline provides an order that balances all the aspects of life; in that balance we discover movement and growth in many ways.

Surely the objection will be raised that we simply cannot commit to the kind of time that such a discipline would require. Stopping seven times a day to pray is more than most of us could handle. But we need to make sure that we do not use the time involved as an excuse; we are talking about seven offices a day—not seven hours. Benson, especially, will not accept that line of reasoning as an excuse for not having a

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<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (III.xx.29), 891.

<sup>62</sup> de Waal, *Celtic Way of Prayer*, 54.

<sup>63</sup> de Waal, *Celtic Way of Prayer*, 54.

disciplined prayer life. He was skeptical as he began seeking to pray this way on a daily basis which is probably why we find the following:

Here it is—it takes about twelve minutes to say an office. If you like, you can read all the scriptures appointed for the day and all the psalms at one office, instead of spreading them out over more than one, and get an office up to some astounding number like seventeen minutes. Or you can spread the scriptures out and average about nine minutes. But what is hard to do is to get an office up to an amount of time that I can reasonably say is too large an amount to have time for on a regular basis.<sup>64</sup>

He is trying to convince others, but one might suspect that he originally did this brief time-study to convince himself. When faced with a more realistic accounting of the chronology involved, this discipline does not seem harsh at all.

Annie Dillard, who has a keen eye for details, says that this approach to prayer shapes our days. Rather than us shaping our schedules to fit our needs and desires, and letting God in when we think we might have a break, this discipline will give us a new perspective; Dillard says, “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour and that one is what we are doing. A schedule defends us from chaos and whim. It is a net for catching days. It is a scaffolding on which a worker can stand and work with both hands at sections of time.”<sup>65</sup>

By taking the time to develop the discipline, indeed, one’s perspective on time in prayer will be changed. Richard Foster notes Thomas Kelley’s *Testament of Devotion* when considering the time for prayer; Kelley said, “It takes no time, but occupies all our time.”<sup>66</sup> That is a statement that could only come from someone who had already invested large amounts of time in prayer. But the end result is what is sought: such

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<sup>64</sup> Benson, *In Constant Prayer*, 89.

<sup>65</sup> Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989), 32.

<sup>66</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 45.



awareness of God that one always seems to be praying, one is fully engaged in the conversation throughout the day.

But if we are to revive this stream of prayer in our own lives, then we must make some plan, some effort, and some attention towards it. Benson notes that we are prone to make plans and projections about most everything else in our lives that we consider important. We are even likely to stress how important our spirituality is to us. But we are not very likely at all to make a plan about how we are going to grow in our spiritual lives. As Benson puts it, “The place we are least likely to make such a plan is when it comes to our spiritual lives. We would not dream of being this way about anything else.”<sup>67</sup>

Benson reiterates the need for an intentional plan in a humorous way: “My friend Father Edward J. Farrell used to say, ‘The three greatest obstacles to the spiritual life are inertia, amnesia, and manana.’ Whenever we set out to do something important to us, we make choices, we make lists, we make schedules. If it matters, we make a plan.”<sup>68</sup> The reality is that many, if not most, contemporary Christians do not have a plan in place for their spiritual growth. We may say that it is important, but as Benson notes, if it truly was we would be willing to exercise the discipline required to have some form of plan.

None of this will happen without a commitment of time. We have to be intentional in our spiritual disciplines if we expect to see growth. Even in Murray’s day this was well known; Murray says that we are under “a law of slow growth.”<sup>69</sup> As Willard, Foster, and others have noted, the spiritual life is not a sprint—it takes time. Murray says it this way:

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<sup>67</sup> Benson, *In Constant Prayer*, 78.

<sup>68</sup> Benson, *In Constant Prayer*, 83.

<sup>69</sup> Murray, *Andrew Murray on Prayer*, 201.

It is just the same in religion. There can be no communion with a holy God, no fellowship between heaven and earth, no power for the salvation of the souls of others, unless much time is set apart for it. Just as it is necessary for a child, for long years to eat and learn every day, so the life of grace depends entirely on the time men are willing to give to it day by day.<sup>70</sup>

We would rather make God fit our schedule than try to make our lives fit into this pattern of disciplined prayer. God tends to get our “breaks” such as when we are driving down the road or watching the commercials or waiting around for something else.

Although most of the church has kept a discipline of prayer for centuries, we have now moved into an era in which such a discipline is viewed as restrictive and legalistic. Never have so many clamored for spiritual growth but ignored the means by which that might happen. Hoping that spiritual growth will chance to happen in the midst of our already over-crowded and over-extended schedules is not realistic. If we are to develop spiritually, then we will need some measure of discipline to give structure that search.

### Dialogue

So prayer should be a daily experience and it should be a daily discipline as well. The next step in growing spiritually is to remember that prayer is a dialogue. We are conversing with the Creator of the universe; we are talking with the one who created us in His image.<sup>71</sup> We are engaging the one who formed us in the womb and knows our days before we even live them.<sup>72</sup>

Larry Crabb says that for many Christians prayer is all about us. Too many Christians “pray” when someone is sick or dying or needs a job or is anxious about a decision. But we do not often “pray” simply to spend time with God and grow deeper in

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<sup>70</sup> Murray, *Andrew Murray on Prayer*, 201.

<sup>71</sup> Genesis 1:26-27.

<sup>72</sup> Psalm 139:13-16.

our conversation with Him. We tend to use it much more like an incantation rather than a conversation. The prayer lists of most churches are filled with the names of people who have some need, often for some thing, that we are supposed to keep lifted to God. God already knows everyone of those needs and what will be the best outcome of each of those situations. We do not need to tell God how to run the world or our lives—God already knows better than we. We think of ourselves as consultants—offering God information and instruction because God may not know what to do in this case. There is a very real selfish motive within all of this that is difficult to let go. Our prayers tend to be centered on our requests rather than our relationship with God.

What is envisioned here is more than just offering the Almighty our latest list of things that we would like fixed. What is envisioned here is a multilayered conversation that involves silence, words, body language, and even some understanding of the principals involved, the I and the You of the conversation.

Miller aids us in his description of this kind of prayer. He says that prayer should be like the conversation around the dining room table as a family gathers for a meal. There is conversation, back and forth, about the members of the family and what is going on in their lives. It is a natural thing. As Miller says, “We don’t think about communication or words, but about whom we are talking with. Prayer is simply the medium through which we experience and connect to God.”<sup>73</sup>

Even more emphatically, Miller says, “Oddly enough, many people struggle to learn how to pray because they are focusing on praying, not on God.”<sup>74</sup> In a vivid image, Miller says that approach is like trying to drive by looking at the windshield instead of

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<sup>73</sup> Miller, *A Praying Life*, 20.

<sup>74</sup> Miller, *A Praying Life*, 20.

what is beyond it. Prayer is about talking with God, not learning some esoteric process. Many may not be seeing past the windshield in their attempts to pray. In the same way that driving is about what it beyond the car, so, too, prayer must move us beyond the vehicle into a dynamic relationship.

For some the focus on the windshield is the attention to our own words in prayer. Murray offers “Hints for the Inner Chamber” as guides to learning more and more of prayer. He says that we must begin with thanks to God for the incredible love that we have received. He also says that “you must prepare yourself for prayer by prayerful Bible study.”<sup>75</sup> When we rely too much on our own words to attempt to pray we find it difficult and draining, but the Bible offers a rich trove of words and expressions to assist us. It is not our words alone that constitute prayer: Murray reminds us “...prayer is not a soliloquy, where everything comes from one side, but it is a dialogue, where God’s child listens to what the Father says, replies to it, and then asks for the things he needs.”<sup>76</sup> If all our attention is on us, then our soliloquies are not likely to be true prayer.

As with all conversations there is a certain flow to it. Most all conversations involve pauses and stops and periods of silence. Dialogue is more than just the words themselves; it is also the manner in which the conversation takes place. Some of the conversation will occur with no words at all. Indeed, silence is a practice that allows us to stop long enough to hear what it is that God might be saying. This is not easy for a people who are accustomed to living in the “Kingdom of Noise,” as C.S. Lewis called it.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Murray, *Andrew Murray on Prayer*, 198.

<sup>76</sup> Murray, *Andrew Murray on Prayer*, 198.

<sup>77</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters from The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 187.

Foster notes that “Soren Kierkegaard once observed: ‘A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening.’”<sup>78</sup>

Learning to listen may well be the first step in true dialogue. Too many never learn to listen. They are preparing their next statement before their dialogue partner has finished expressing a thought. We tend to do the same thing with God. Finding a quiet place is a needed step in the dialogue process.

Monasteries are becoming popular places to retreat so that we moderns might find something of the silence that makes dialogue possible. People are searching for a place where they can unplug the noise of the world and perhaps hear a word from God. Jamison, writing about Sr. Bruno and his rigid rule for silence in the Carthusian order, says “...the power of silence lived in solitude is so real that it can in fact fill all of life for some people. And my belief is not only that it can fill all of life for some people but that it must fill some of life for all people.”<sup>79</sup> The desire to have at least some of that silence is growing in our age of noise.

In *The Book of Hours* Deignan says that we must gradually quiet and calm our minds to the point where we can move towards the deeper levels of our own nature: “It is aided by regular intervals of silence and solitude, stillness, and serenity that allow our lives to be listening to the ever-speaking mystery of God. Merton reminds us that while our existence is noisy, our essential being is silent; beneath the clamor of our chaotic lives there is a resonant ground of silence. In this rich silence—the silence of God—we

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<sup>78</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 39.

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Jamison, *Seeking Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 40.

taste the sweetness of our own souls, the peace of our own hearts.”<sup>80</sup> Merton echoes the words of the Psalmist when he says, “Be still, and know that I am God.”<sup>81</sup> Stillness and silence will often be found together.

Silence must be part of our conversation. It may be an uncomfortable part for those who are not accustomed to it. But the proper use of silence brings greater depth and dynamics to our conversations. Foster says “if we are silent when we should speak, we are not living the Discipline of silence. If we speak when we should be silent, we again miss the mark.”<sup>82</sup> Bonhoeffer, likewise, notes the importance of silence in our conversations with God and one another when he says that “the mark of solitude is silence, as speech is the mark of community. Silence and speech have the same inner correspondence and difference as do solitude and community. One does not exist without the other. Right speech comes out of silence, and right silence comes out of speech.”<sup>83</sup>

Silence attunes our ears, minds and hearts so that we might hear the word which God, our dialogue partner, is trying to say. If we do not have some time during the day when we withdraw from all the voices and noises around us, then we will be missing parts of the conversation. Sometimes silence can say more than words.

But the God who can speak to us in the midst of silence is found in other ways as well. Much of what we communicate with one another we do with body language, or a gesture, or some other sign that may not be known to others. God, likewise, can speak to us through the creation or through others. We have to be listening to more than just words.

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas Merton, *A Book of Hours*. Ed. Kathleen Deignan. (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2007), 26.

<sup>81</sup> Psalm 46:10.

<sup>82</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 99.

<sup>83</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 78.

Merton learned to 'hear' God in all manner of communications. Merton certainly heard God in the Word of Scripture as he was bathed in it day after day for years through the Divine Offices and through consistent practice of *lectio divina*. But Merton had an eye and an ear for the sacred in most everything he saw and heard. He was looking for and listening for the holy in nature, in poetry, in music, in a variety of ways. Deignan says that he "knew well the Word of God is not only being uttered in the sacred scriptures, but most primordially in creation, more existentially in history, more imaginatively in works of art, more immediately and personally in human experience. Because he perceived the dimensionality of the Word of God he understands how to read it in all its myriad forms."<sup>84</sup> If we are to listen more fully to the conversation with God, then we, too, must learn to listen in different keys. Prayer is more than a verbal exercise; the conversation takes place on many levels.

Even when we turn our attention away from silence or non-verbal conversation we must learn to translate the language of the conversation. Our words convey depth and meaning beyond what might be found on the dictionary page. In the language of prayer we move in towards the depth of our being so that this conversation is not the same as much of what makes up the daily chatter in which we find ourselves.

When we move into the language of prayer, when we go deeper into our communion with God we must first understand something of ourselves. Merton says the following about the contemplative life, but it could be said as easily about our daily prayers: "Contemplative life, therefore, begins with the recovery of one's natural unity, a reintegration of our compartmentalized, colonized, traumatized, technologically entranced, and workaholic being. We must gather our fragmented selves from our

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<sup>84</sup> Merton, *A Book of Hours*, 22.

distracted, exhausted, noise polluted, and frenzied existence so that when we say “I” there is actually a unified human person present to support that pronoun.”<sup>85</sup> When we say “I” we have some ideas about what that means. But saying that “I” with commitment and authenticity and honesty is more than what happens in most of our daily discussions about the practical matters of life.

The “I” we utter in prayer must be something deeper. Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, says that when we say “I” we are not just saying “I” but we are saying something more. In every conversation we are establishing a relationship and the nature of that relationship is shaped by elements deep within us. Saying “I” is also saying something more.

Buber’s seminal work is entitled *I and Thou*, which hints at the most critical of the word pairs that humans can speak. Buber says this so well and so sparsely that this deserves to be heard in as close to his own words as we have in English:

The world is twofold for man in accordance with his two fold attitude.  
The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words that he can speak.  
The basic words are not single words but word pairs.  
One basic word is the word pair I-You.  
The other basic word pair is the word pair I-It; but this word is not changed when He or She takes the place of it.  
Thus the I of man is also twofold.  
For the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It.<sup>86</sup>

Basic words do not state something that might exist outside of them; by being spoken they establish a mode of existence.  
Basic words are spoken with one’s being.  
When one says You, the I of the word-pair I-you is said, too.

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<sup>85</sup> Merton, *A Book of Hours*, 25.

<sup>86</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 53. While Kaufmann’s title retains the original sense of the formal ‘Thou’ from the German, he uses the common English ‘You,’ although he capitalizes it to distinguish it from the informal, common usage. The capitalized ‘You’ will be used here to show and retain the distinction. Buber’s language is often poetic so it will be shown in the attempt to capture that as well.



When one says It, the I of the word pair I-It is said, too.  
The basic word pair I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being.  
The basic word pair I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being.<sup>87</sup>

What Buber has captured is critical to the language of prayer. Whenever we say we are praying we are using a sense of the "I." It is possible for us to address God as an "it." Many are the prayers that seek to manipulate God into a desired course of action that will yield anticipated results. To do this is to treat God as an "it" among the other "its" in the world. To pray in this way is to lessen both God and ourselves. Rather than a true dialogue, to use the language of "I-it" when addressing God is a means of placing demands upon the Almighty as if God must do our bidding. It would be little different than commanding an underling to do this or do that.

Even apart from prayer, most of the conversations taking place in our world are of the "I-it" variety. One may use the most civil of terms and say them in the most polite manner, but if the "I-it" is implied there is no real conversation, no real connection between people.

For Buber we are always working in one realm or the other. Our words do more than express something, they establish the connection that will be made which also has a bearing on the language of prayer.

The world as experience belongs to the basic word I-It.  
The basic word I-You establishes the world of relation.<sup>88</sup>

For Buber experience is always on the surface; it is the connection between objects that occurs in time and space. Experience, even if it occurs between two people, is never a depth relationship. Relation, on the other hand, is a connection of encounter between two

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<sup>87</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 54.

<sup>88</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 56. Buber's work is poetic and parallel in form as is common in Jewish poetry and thought. To retain this special emphasis the form will be used here as well.

that involves the whole person. The language of “I-it” never affords true relation; it is always speech about something. The language of “I-You” is always relational because it involves the depths of our being. We live amidst experiences, but we long for encounters.

“The experiencing of It is planned and purposeful,” says Buber.<sup>89</sup> Our materialistic world is driven, and the people in it, by the constant concern for It. In this scheme people always become Its to other people who use them as another mean to satisfy the drive for more It. People, who should be other Yous, are instead treated as Its by the lawyers, the bankers, the stockholders, the politicians, the con-men, and yes, even by those clergy who have lapsed into I-It thinking about their churches and the souls that inhabit them. It is not unheard of for churches to look at their members in this same light and speak in this same way.

Buber goes on to say that “the You encounters me by grace—it cannot be found by seeking. But that I speak the basic word to it is a deed of my whole being, is my essential deed ... All actual life is encounter.”<sup>90</sup> In a world that is set on having experience after experience, actual life is rare. The spirituality that many are seeking is some form of experience that does involve the whole of their being. Until we can speak from that integrated “I” that Merton pointed to, and until we understand if we are speaking it as “I-You” or “I-it” our prayer life will be a shadow of what God intends.

Buber says that actual life is an entering into the relationship that is present in the “You.” We cannot be “I” without “You.” Most of what passes for “real life” in this world of illusion is the heaping up of experiences that are never true encounters. We see a

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<sup>89</sup> Friedman, *The Life of Dialogue*, 58.

<sup>90</sup> Friedman, *The Life of Dialogue*, 62.

world filled with people who believe that it is in their doing, their action, and their controlling the experience that they are going to find love, happiness, bliss, and be fulfilled. Buber claims that such an approach is not living at all.

But there is still relationship that is possible in our everyday lives. Whenever we address one another in true relationship, then we are in a sense participating in the life of the Eternal You. Buber states it this way:

Extended, the lines of relationships intersect in the Eternal You.

Every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every single You the basic word addresses the Eternal You. The mediatorship of the You of all beings accounts for the fullness of our relationships to them—and for the lack of fulfillment. The innate You is actualized each time without ever being perfected. It attains perfection solely in the immediate relationship to the You that in accordance with its nature cannot become an It.

Men have addressed their eternal You by many names. When they sang of what they had thus named they still meant You: the first myths were hymns of praise. Then the names entered into It-language; men felt impelled more and more to think of and talk about the eternal You as an It. But all names of God remain hallowed—because they have been used not only to speak *of* God but also to speak *to* him.<sup>91</sup>

The challenge, then, of an authentic prayer life is to speak *to* Him, and not talk *of* Him.

Our tendency is to make God into an object of our It-world that can be manipulated into our bidding. Our ego, our I-It writ large, if you will, desires to be the center of all things and experience such that we perceive all other Its as radiating from us. This is the confusion of our lives—we are turned upon ourselves and frustrated at those things, those “Its,” around us that do not center themselves on us. Repentance, or returning, for Buber is turning towards the true center of all relationships, the Eternal You, in whom all things are actually centered.

We turn towards the eternal You, the You which by its nature cannot become an It, when we understand ourselves to be addressed by God—not the other way round.

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<sup>91</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 123.

That is why the call of God is so critical to our understanding ourselves; it is only in that conversation that we are truly who we are and only in that conversation can we truly encounter the Eternal You in ways that involve our whole being. Everything else is a form of I-It and serves only our ego.

Prayer and the language of prayer must be in the form of “I-You.” But we have great difficulty trying to say this or trying to stay in this relationship since our tendency is to fall back into “I-it” operations. Buber would say that the good news is that the Eternal You desires to relate with us so that the language of prayer is given to us by grace, not sought or earned or achieved through “I-it” means. The deepest dialogue possible is one that comes to us from God, rather than from our own words and egos.

### Devotion

The final aspect of prayer that deserves our attention is that of devotion. Prayer is not a self-sustaining or self-validating activity. We pray because we are in communion with someone else. Prayer is intensely relational. God desires our prayers if for no other reason than it reminds us that God is God and we are not. Prayer reminds us of the difference between us and the Eternal You, but also of God’s desire to overcome the distance between us. Without that relationship, prayer would make little sense.

This shift to prayer being focused on the other rather than on us seems strange to many people. Benson notes that there is a paradox in our prayers. We most often think of prayer as something for us. We have to tell God all kinds of things that God already knows. We have to instruct God on what we think would be a positive outcome in a given situation. We have to inform God of how we are feeling about someone or some

situation. In other words, most of our prayer life is focused on us. As Benson puts it, "Those prayers are for us. The prayer of the office is for God."<sup>92</sup> Getting to the place where we can grasp that our prayer life is for God's sake and not for us may not be an easy journey to make.

There are a variety of ways to make the move. Larry Crabb suggests that what we need to do is to focus on one basic premise: relationship precedes requests.<sup>93</sup> This becomes almost a mantra for him. He expends a good bit of energy illustrating the ways in which we have been trained to pray for things from God, as if God is a machine that dispenses things on request.

Crabb's path of prayer moves towards what he calls the PAPA prayer. The basic design is this:

- P – present yourself to God without pretence.
- A – attend to how you're thinking of God.
- P – purge yourself of anything blocking your relationship with God.
- A – approach God as the *first thing* in your life.<sup>94</sup>

When one applies this to prayer, then the whole conception of prayer gets reversed. We come to God to enjoy His presence and not just make our requests. We spend more time listening to God than we do speaking to God. We are more empty and ready to be filled than we are full of things that we think God needs to hear. We are more ready to receive and accept what God would offer us than we are ready to tell God how to run the universe and our little corner of it. We are ready to hear from God in ways that we simply cannot do when our minds and hearts are filled with what we think is important.

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<sup>92</sup> Benson, *In Constant Prayer*, 49.

<sup>93</sup> Larry Crabb, *The PAPA Prayer: The Prayer You've Never Prayed* (Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2006), 29.

<sup>94</sup> Crabb, *The PAPA Prayer*, 10.

He is not saying that learning this way of praying will be easy; in fact, he would state just the opposite:

We will neither enjoy the PAPA prayer nor flow with its rhythm like a child finally taking off on his two-wheeler until we realize that the chief purpose of prayer is not to get things from God. Neither is it to praise or thank Him from a distance. *The chief purpose of prayer is to get to know God*, to deepen our relationship with Him, to nourish the life of God He's already placed within us, and to do it all to satisfy His desire for relationship with us.<sup>95</sup>

The heart of prayer is relationship. Petitions and intercessions are part of prayer as Murray, especially, and Foster and others have noted. But if the relationship is not first, then prayer is missing the pulse that makes it alive and vital. In the simplest terms, Crabb says that, "It may be a brand-new thought—and a radical one—that prayer is getting more of God rather than getting more from God."<sup>96</sup>

The main focus is on the relationship with God, but de Waal has noted that all prayer is intensely relational and those relations extend in many directions. She says "I have found in Celtic understanding nothing of the highly individualistic, competitive, inward-looking approach common in today's society. Here, instead, everyone sees themselves in relation to one another, and that extends beyond human beings to the wild creatures, the birds and animals, the earth itself."<sup>97</sup> In the same ways that a Celtic knot interweaves within, around, back and forth upon itself, so, too, does Celtic Christianity weave all the elements of life and faith and experience together into an intense interconnectivity that includes all around it. This way of prayer prays constantly for everything that is going on in life. She goes further in saying that she sees her work as "not about definitions of prayer or terminology for prayer or arguments about prayer,

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<sup>95</sup> Crabb, *The PAPA Prayer*, 42.

<sup>96</sup> Crabb, *The PAPA Prayer*, 71.

<sup>97</sup> de Waal, *Celtic Way of Prayer*, xv.

though all of these have their place ... this book is about a love relationship: an enduring, continuing, growing love relationship with the great God of the universe.”<sup>98</sup> As with Crabb and others, the heart of prayer is the relationship.

There is always room for that relationship to grow because God is infinite and we are so limited. Miller quotes Thomas Merton who said: “Prayer is an expression of who we are... We are a living incompleteness. We are a gap, an emptiness that calls for fulfillment.”<sup>99</sup> That emptiness is placed there by God, not as punishment, but as the means by which to draw us back into relationship. Many seek to fill that void with anything other than God. But prayer is God’s way of offering us the fulfillment that we long for. Perhaps no one has said it better than St. Augustine when he said, “because you made us for yourself our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.”<sup>100</sup>

### Conclusion

What is offered here is in no way exhaustive of what might be said of prayer, much less the spiritual searches that are possible or beneficial. But it is an approach to the central issue of spirituality—the relationship to God. In prayer that relationship grows and is nurtured. In prayer that relationship finds its deepest expressions and highest communion. In prayer our “I” is addressed and called by the “Eternal You” who is seeking us with a love that is beyond understanding.

This prayer will take place amidst the daily events of life. This prayer will be best served by an intentional discipline of a pattern of prayer such as has been part of the life

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<sup>98</sup> de Waal, *Celtic Way of Prayer*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Miller, *A Praying Life*, 55.

<sup>100</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*. Trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin. (London: Penguin Books, 1961), (I.i),

communication that comes in myriad forms. This prayer will lead us to a place where we love God and know that we are loved by God.



## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a wealth of literature available today in the area of spirituality. One only needs to explore the titles at a bookstore to see the explosion of works addressing our spirituality. Many of these are focused on the individual and often have the feel of finding one's own individual path; most do not address the question of leadership and the communal nature of leadership, especially in a church context.

There is also a host of literature available today on issues of leadership. Leadership is a hot topic, and the variety of resources in this field is truly staggering. The Blackabys note that in a recent study Bennis and Nanus discovered over eight hundred and fifty definitions of leadership.<sup>1</sup> This leaves plenty of room for interpretation.

But it is not always easy to see how spirituality and leadership come together. Even within the church, there are a variety of ways in which these two elements are addressed. How we understand spirituality and leadership will affect the processes through which we prepare ourselves for leading the church.

#### The Problem

At least part of the problem of joining spirituality and leadership is that we have often viewed these two things as being dissimilar. Many of the traits which we might associate with powerful leaders are not viewed as spiritual. Alan Nelson has noted that "in the past we have looked to leaders (regardless of their spiritualities) to learn how to

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby. *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda*. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 16.

lead. For spirituality, we have looked to the Desert Fathers, enlightened gurus, pastors, and priests who were often clueless about leading.”<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps this latter group was not “clueless” as Nelson claims, but there was at least a different idea about what leadership entailed. The Desert Fathers, such as Anthony, were revered for their intense, ascetic lifestyle. Many of them preferred the life of a hermit in which they avoided others; many of them refused or resisted attempts to make them become leaders of others. The more time they spent with others, the less time they felt they had with God, which was their primary focus. The Desert Fathers might well be on the required reading list for classes in spirituality, but they would not appear on the same list for Masters of Business Administration programs.

On the other hand, many of the traits that we recognize and revere in leadership are quite different. We look for those who are able to be “self-starters,” who are able to “influence people,” who are “able to take charge in a crisis,” who are “able to effect change in a positive direction.” Leadership in our culture is viewed largely as the ability to make something happen through directing others. It is the ability to use power towards an end and move people, either as individuals or an organization, towards that end; in other words, leadership is “getting the job done.”

It is not difficult to see how hard it might be to put the two of these ideas together. But if we are to develop leaders within a church, then we must find a way. If we focus solely on spirituality, then we run the risk of not being effectively engaged with the church community or the community around us. If we focus solely on leadership, then

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership: Harnessing the Wisdom, Guidance and Power of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 12.

we run the risk of having people with power but not the compassion and virtues that we would hope. Thus, the task of preparing spiritual leaders is not an easy one.

The PCUSA has recognized the challenge presented here. In a study paper that explored the nature of ordination in the church we find this: "The process of preparing persons to exercise the office of elder is in need of much renewal and real reform. If the elders are to fulfill their offices of leadership in God's service responsibly and effectively, they need to acquire the appropriate knowledge and necessary skills prior to assuming office rather than learning on the job."<sup>3</sup> That the church recognizes the need for reform indicates that something we are doing in terms of preparation is not working.

Others have seen the problem and highlighted the need for spiritual leaders. A major premise of the Blackabys' study is that we are facing a leadership gap today in all areas of our culture; nowhere is this more important than in the church. They point out the irony that at a time when people are more and more interested in spiritual matters there are those who are willing to follow leaders such as Jim Jones and David Koresh.<sup>4</sup> People want to be led, but they need leaders worth following.

Churches are filled with people looking for leaders worth following. The Blackabys further stress that point in the following:

Society at large is displaying widespread and growing interest in spiritual issues. Amazingly, at a time of renewed interest in spiritual things, church and denominations are declining. According to George Barna, 'the American church is dying due to a lack of strong leadership. In this time of unprecedented opportunity and plentiful resources, the church is actually losing influence. The primary reason is a lack of leadership. Nothing is more important than leadership.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Theology and Worship Unit, Presbyterian Church (USA). *A Proposal for Considering the Theology and Practice of Ordination in the Presbyterian Church (USA)*. (Louisville: Theology and Ministry Unit, 1992), 95.

<sup>4</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 8-9.

But the church's leaders are struggling as well. Charles Olsen says that Presbyterian Research Services conducted a survey of six-hundred and five elders that were ending their term on session. In an open-ended question about their term of service, roughly twenty-five percent gave positive response. But roughly thirty-three percent offered negative responses. In addition to those numbers, twenty-nine percent reported feeling burned out and weary. This is a shocking report from an organization whose purpose is to renew and refresh.<sup>6</sup>

Olsen further states his case in the following:

From a strategic standpoint, one who holds hope for the renewal of congregational life has to start somewhere. What better place to start than the board and its meetings. If those meetings and relationships are life giving rather than life draining, the board can become a model of community and ministry for the whole church. As I see it, the level of commitment in a congregation will not rise above that of the set apart leaders. The sense of community and care for one another will not rise above that of the consistory. The stewardship practices will not rise above those of the council. The prayer life will not rise above that of the board. The capacity to reflect biblically and theologically will not rise above that of the vestry. The willingness to take a prophetic position will not rise above that of the deacons. The hope and excitement for the future of the church will not rise above that of the session.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, our congregations will adjust to the level of our leadership. If our leadership does not have a growing spiritual life, then our congregations will probably not be growing either.

We are now in a time when it is more important for leaders, especially spiritual leaders, to be cognizant of the changes in both leadership and spirituality that are taking place. Nelson captures this present tension beautifully when he says that "these are

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1995), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 9.

ancient-future times.”<sup>8</sup> The church, an ancient institution, must live within a contemporary culture that has little knowledge of or about the church. How the church addresses the question of spiritual leadership will affect not only the church, but also the world beyond its doors.

One element of our exploration must be the matter of whether we are preparing people for a particular task of leadership or are we looking more at people’s spiritual formation. There are some efforts that seem to be focused on getting people ready to perform their tasks, duties, and responsibilities. These efforts are generally focused on information and transferring that information to people who do not yet know it. Other efforts are directed more at helping people to become deeper and different people. These generally offer more attention to the practices that people might use to grow, especially prayer.

When one is focused more on the nature of the task, then the emphasis will be on getting the job done, and the result may sound much more like it is focused on leadership rather than spirituality. When one is focused on the nature of the person who is going to be leading, then the emphasis seems to be more on spirituality. We will look at some works that seem to fall into either camp.

### Training Models

There have been numerous resources written concerning officer training in the PCUSA. We will look at several of these and note the similarities and differences. We will also see the ways in which these books seem to fall more into the informational-practical camp. It is not that any of these are devoid of spirituality, but it is typically

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<sup>8</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 12.

understated and given little emphasis. In other words, the content does not seem to be consistent with the claims of the importance of spiritual practices.

### Position Paper of the PCUSA

We'll start with a position paper that was prepared by a committee of the PCUSA.<sup>9</sup> We have already noted that they stated the process of elder education is in need of renewal and reform. This committee has understood the spiritual nature of the task as evidenced by the following: "The task force recognizes that those who are called to office are usually gifted in some way. There are two gifts that deserve special consideration according to the task force: first, the ability to discern and interpret the context or the church's ministry and mission in light of the Word; and secondly, the courage to order the life and mission of the church in obedience to the Word."<sup>10</sup> These sound like theological and spiritual tasks that would require spiritual gifts.

But the Committee was not able to sustain that focus. The Committee went on to state: "Elders need to have a wealth of practical knowledge and to possess a number of practical skills in order to enable them to oversee the spiritual life and mission of the congregation. Depending on their particular responsibilities in governing bodies, they often need organizational, financial, legal, and even building trade skills."<sup>11</sup> The gist is

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<sup>9</sup> For those not familiar with the PCUSA, the Presbyterian Church forms a committee for virtually everything. So one of the major differences is, unlike most books on the subject, this work is a creation of a committee appointed by the Presbyterian Church (USA) to address the subject of ordination. The list of those involved is long and representative of a diverse variety of folks within the church who were called together for this specific task. There is no single person to claim authorship, and probably no one on the committee would want to. It reflects something of the communal and mutual nature of the Presbyterian Church in that the committee was composed of folks who were heavily involved in the academic world and those who lived most of their days in the pews; there were teaching elders as well as ruling elders.

<sup>10</sup> Theology and Worship Unit, *Theology and Practice of Ordination in the Presbyterian Church (USA)* (Louisville: Theology and Worship Ministry Unit, 1992), 92-93.

<sup>11</sup> Theology and Worship Unit, *Theology and Practice of Ordination*, 92.

that one elected to serve on the Session may well be doing more of these practical matters than discerning and interpreting the church's ministry and mission. These are tasks that may be required for maintaining the church, but they do not necessarily lead the church in new directions. These are skills that may well be gained in some other means of education such as a professional school, a trade school, or even a business college. They are not taught by the church.

It is recognized that spiritual leadership is something more than just what skills one may have. The committee, as with others we will see, understands that character is part of what is required for effective service. For elders the committee says: "Their lifestyles, no less than their decisions and actions in overseeing the life of the church become indicators to both members and others of the commitments and values honored by the church. Thus, the character traits expected of elders should be no less clear or important than those expected of ministers of the Gospel."<sup>12</sup> In other words, who becomes a leader is as important as the task they do, although the committee does not give much guidance in how that is to happen.

In this case this task force sees the need for something different. They have heard or encountered feedback that tells them that preparation is not what it might be. So they begin by saying perhaps the preparation process should be similar to that used for teaching elders. In other words, they would like to suggest a candidacy process that takes time and effort before bestowing the office. The typical process of candidacy for teaching elders takes two to three years minimum while the candidate is enrolled in seminary. Certainly this is more than one would expect of those who are being asked to

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<sup>12</sup> Theology and Worship Unit, *Theology and Practice of Ordination*, 93.

serve on a local church session. The time commitment would be too great for most to undertake.

But here as elsewhere we discover that the time involved is one of the key issues with preparation. The general rule is that the task is taking place in a compressed time window and that hinders the quality of the process. The committee states it this way:

Most congregations elect new classes of elders sometime in the fall, with ordination taking place just a few weeks or months later—scarcely a sufficient length of time to ensure their readiness for ministry. But if persons were elected six or even twelve months prior to assuming office, they could embark on a holistic process of preparation for ministry, including not only study of Scripture and the church's constitutional standards, but also hands-on learning about the ways in which elders function within the life of both the local congregation and the wider church.<sup>13</sup>

The committee's hope for a longer and more intensive time of preparation has not been adopted at large by the PCUSA. This paper does a better job of highlighting the issue than it does of offering a solid solution.

Next we will explore several books that have been used for elder education with the PCUSA. Each of these books was written with preparation for elders in mind. All of them have been used by countless ministers, sessions, and elders in the process. All of them assume that those who are reading them have been nominated or elected to serve as an elder in the church. They tend to be shorter books with an organizational structure that lends itself to a set number of educational times focused around brief chapters.

Paul S. Wright – *The Presbyterian Elder*

This work was first released in 1957 and has been used extensively throughout the PCUSA. It is arranged in six chapters which would fit nicely with what many churches

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<sup>13</sup> Theology and Worship Unit, *Theology and Practice of Ordination*, 95-96.



have done in terms of elder training. The chapters are short which might commend this to many. In other words, here is a brief overview that is condensed to be manageable to cover in a short period of time.

Wright begins by highlighting the distinctive way in which Reformed and Presbyterian churches look at leadership. There is not so much distinction between clergy and laity in Wright's view. He mentions the same difference that others have lifted up: "The difference between 'lay' and 'clergy' lies in particular functions performed by those who are ordained."<sup>14</sup> There is no great distinction between the two, and there is to be no "clerical class." In this regard, Wright is solidly Reformed in this thinking and perspective.

At this point he lifts up two elements of the relationship between clergy and laity that are important for Presbyterian and Reformed folks. First, he reminds the reader that "priesthood is an office of every member of the church."<sup>15</sup> Second, in stressing our equality he says "this relationship between persons in the Presbyterian Church is also seen in our concept of ordination."<sup>16</sup> We acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in each one who is called and ordained; it is the giftedness of the Spirit that sets us apart for special works, not our own skills or abilities.

While Wright strays briefly when he says "so by divine call and by training, the Minister of Word and Sacrament occupies a position of unique value and responsibility in relation to the flock of Christ,"<sup>17</sup> he will temper that statement by hearkening back to another Reformed emphasis and caution against lifting anyone up too far. He says that

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<sup>14</sup> Paul S. Wright, *The Presbyterian Elder*. Ed. W. Ben Lane. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1992), 10.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 14.

“our Reformed heritage causes us to take a dim view of ‘professionalism’ and ‘specialists’ in matters of faith.”<sup>18</sup> He is fairly animated in his view: “It is a perversion to think of our faith in terms of ‘professionalism.’ We would not tolerate professionals to be responsible for praying for us any more than we would tolerate professionals responsible for showing Christian love.”<sup>19</sup>

Wright uses Calvin and his view of the early church as a model for organization that should be emulated. Wright says:

Calvin held that Christ had instituted in the church the four offices of pastor, teacher, ruling elder, and deacon. Pastors were to preach the Word of God, teachers were to establish schools for the education of the young and the instruction of adults (the beginning of the public school system and the Presbyterian emphasis on education), ruling elders were to maintain order and discipline, and deacons were to administer charities for the relief of the poor and the destitute.<sup>20</sup>

In many churches today, several of these offices have been rolled into one. In many Presbyterian Churches there is a unicameral board of officers which must look to the life of the congregation in all aspects. There might be separate committees designed to focus on specific areas, but the office itself is seen as being responsible for all elements of Christian life. Here is another issue that faces those who will assume the role of spiritual leader within a congregation—what was once divided into several offices has now been condensed into one position.<sup>21</sup>

Wright then turns to the question of who qualifies for leadership. He puts forth the one question that seems to haunt the whole process from initial call from the nominations committee to preparation to actual service: “Am I good enough to be an

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<sup>18</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 14-15.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> The unicameral system is used at Mars Hill Presbyterian Church where this project takes place.

elder?”<sup>22</sup> Each of those who are chosen to be an Elder elect must answer that for himself or herself.

Wright goes on with two approaches to the question: “What must an elder *believe*, and what must an elder *be*?”<sup>23</sup> Although he is not using the same language that we will see elsewhere, Wright is raising the question of the difference between what elders do in the practical sense and who elders are in the theological sense. His use of *believe* and *be* is a foretaste of what others will see and address in their own terms. The tension between the practical and the theological is beginning to show.

Wright was perhaps ahead of his time in recognizing the tension that is here. He moves into a chapter to address that question more explicitly. He states it in this way: “Faith and character are intimately related. What we believe is reflected in our lives, and, conversely, what we do has determinative influence on our faith. Our lives speak far more convincingly than our words.”<sup>24</sup> The connection of faith and character is at the heart of the office. It is not just that we have people who can do certain tasks, but that we have people who are of a particular character.

Wright is intent on helping the officer-elect to see that it is not our own goodness that qualifies us for the task—it is our willingness to be committed to a conversation with God. Wright says that to be Christian is to have “the awareness that a conversation is constantly taking place between the person and God, and that the person’s part in the conversation leads to worship, repentance, commitment, and new life. A Christian may or may not be morally better than others, but whatever the Christian does will be done in

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<sup>22</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 31.

the awareness that it is done in the sight of God.”<sup>25</sup> It is the conversation, the awareness, the relationship with God that makes the difference in how the Christian in general, and the officer in particular, goes about the task of spiritual leadership.

Here is a perfect occasion for Wright to move in the direction of devotion and practices about how one might do such things, but he tends to stay with a detached, didactic language about such things rather than engaging them or encouraging the officer to engage them. His language is third person and descriptive, rather than transformative: “So elders will wish to grow in their experience of God. Worship, both private and corporate, will be a valued practice. Reading and studying Scripture will be a part of their discipline. Their lives will be constantly seeking to give the Spirit control over all their words and deeds.”<sup>26</sup> Wright lifts up the ideal, but alas, those very practices seem to be missing from Wright’s own writing.

When Wright turns his attention to the Session and what a Session meeting might look like, he reverts back to the kind of technical-practical language that we find in so many other places. He offers a sample docket (notice the word here is usually a legal term) that has been prepared by the clerk in consultation with the pastor but is clearly formed according to Robert’s Rules of Order that could be used in any organization.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps the most telling comment on Wright’s thought at this point comes when he discusses what would normally take place in a session meeting. Listen carefully to his language: “Following the opening prayer, the first items of business fall to the clerk.”<sup>28</sup> Saying “the first items of business” make it sound as if the prayer was not part of the

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<sup>25</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 45.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 46.

“business” of the gathering. He then spends several paragraphs speaking of the tasks connected with the clerk and the church committees. Prayer will not make an appearance again until the meeting is about to close.

To his credit Wright does say, “*The prime responsibility of the session* (emphasis added) is to assist the pastor in the oversight of the spiritual welfare of the congregation.”<sup>29</sup> He may list it as the prime responsibility, but he has not given much attention to how the spiritual welfare of the officer or of the congregation is part of the process of preparation or operation.

Yes, Wright offers an overview of many aspects of life as a church officer, but he barely touches upon that which he says is our “prime responsibility”—the oversight of the spiritual welfare of the congregation. He mentions almost nothing regarding the spiritual lives of officers in terms of practices or disciplines that could foster the continued growth and maturity that is held up as an ideal. In the final assessment, Wright has offered a brief primer for the details of being an officer, but very little substance for the life of a spiritual leader.

Rice and Chinn – *The Ordination Questions: A Study Guide for Church Officers*

Another offering in this same vein comes from Howard Rice and Calvin Chinn. Rice was responsible for penning *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers*, which is a fine primer on the Reformed perspective on spiritual disciplines.<sup>30</sup> One would expect that since *Reformed Spirituality* was actually written prior to the work on the ordination questions, one would find a strong influence in that direction. That emphasis

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<sup>29</sup> Wright, *Presbyterian Elder*, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Howard Rice, *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers*. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

is largely absent here and one is left with a great deal of the kind of technical/practical language and practice that we have already seen elsewhere.

This short book is intended as a study guide for elders-elect as they prepare to answer the constitutional questions to be ordained and installed as church officers.<sup>31</sup> It follows a very simple layout in which the questions are taken one by one and examined. It has been popular and well-used within the PCUSA. At least part of the attraction may well be the simple arrangement and the short time span for study.

Rice and Chinn begin by distinguishing Presbyterian and Reformed officers from other positions of leadership within the church. We ordain officers much as we do ministers, thereby setting them apart for their position of service.<sup>32</sup> We do not have the same distinction between clergy and laity that is found in other communions. As has been commonly pointed out, the “only distinction among the different offices is their function.”<sup>33</sup> Teaching elders, ruling elders, and deacons all answer several core questions concerning their faith and practice, as well as their intentions to fulfill their vows of service. Rice and Chinn echo Wright in their understanding of an equality between the offices within the church.

Rice and Chinn take the standard approach to what to do with what they have presented—discuss at the end of each chapter.<sup>34</sup> They use the title “Suggestions for Reflection and Action,” but the reality is that their suggestions are pretty much talk about what they have written, sometimes in various groupings.

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<sup>31</sup> W-4.4003. Directory for Worship, Book of Order, PCUSA, 2011 ed., 122.

<sup>32</sup> Howard L. Rice and Calvin Chinn, *The Ordination Questions: A Study Guide for Church Officers*. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 9.

<sup>33</sup> Rice and Chinn, *Ordination Questions*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Rice and Chinn, *Ordination Questions*, 13.

There are some suggested additional reading(s) offered at the end of the chapter as well. Usually these are primarily Book of Order references. It is interesting that the Bible readings are listed last and that there are twice as many Book of Order references as Biblical references. In a subtle and probably unintended way, the authors are putting the Bible last in their work and in their student's minds. The implicit statement here is that people reading this book are supposed to be learning the Book of Order first and foremost.

They lift up the need for a daily encounter with God in the Word of Scripture, but they do not then give instruction or direction as to how that might take place. Again, we are presented some short case studies for discussion and further references to look up on one's own. Here, in fact, is the only place within the book where the Biblical references are listed first; in all other chapters the Bible references come at the end if any are listed at all.<sup>35</sup>

It is interesting that a book that was co-authored by Howard Rice waits until it is almost concluded before mentioning prayer at all. One would expect more spiritual emphasis all along the way in this question of how we are preparing elders for service. Yet prayer is not a part of what has been discussed so far. The reader is almost to the end before the topic arises. At the very least one might have expected some form of prayerful activities listed in the previous chapters. Rice and Chinn give minimal attention to it even here: "We also need to be renewed for our tasks by the development of our own devotional life. In prayer, we are renewed for our work, strengthened for burdens, and enabled to widen our horizons by fellowship with Jesus Christ."<sup>36</sup> They also caution us

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<sup>35</sup> Rice and Chinn, *Ordination Questions*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Rice and Chinn, *Ordination Questions*, 47.

that “to serve with energy is to seek renewal through prayer, relaxation, rest, and occasions for laughter and play,” but there is little guidance here, and before we know it we are back to discussion questions at the end of the chapter.<sup>37</sup>

Rice and Chinn have followed a format that seems to make sense. One does not want to answer questions without some understanding of what is involved. But they offer little here by way of highlighting or helping the officer-elect to develop any practices beyond reading and discussing. There is a great deal of information about the Book of Order and the Book of Confessions, but the Bible is not to the forefront of their presentation. The fact that prayer is mentioned only as an aside towards the later stages of the book tends to lessen its importance for the officer’s preparation. If it is an essential practice for the officer’s service, then it would seem to make sense to address that with the same, or even greater, emphasis as the Book of Order.

Earl S. Johnson – *Selected to Serve: A Guide for Church Officers*

In *Selected to Serve: A Guide for Church Officers*<sup>38</sup> Earl S. Johnson offers one of the most thorough books available on becoming an officer. It is thoughtful in its organization. It begins with the call process, continues through the nominations process, and then, in order, the Book of Order, the Directory for Worship, the Rules of Discipline, the Book of Confessions, the Ordination Vows and standards for officer’s ethics and behavior. It offers greater depth and discussion than something smaller and shorter such as Rice and Chinn’s work, but it might be a bit much for the way that most churches are accustomed to doing elder education.

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<sup>37</sup> Rice and Chinn, *Ordination Questions*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> Earl S. Johnson, *Selected to Serve: A Guide for Church Officers* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2000.)



Johnson echoes some of the same insights into the preparation problems and also those frustrations that come with the office, especially if the preparation is not adequate for the task. He suggests that many Presbyteries offer courses for the whole presbytery or in regional meetings, and he implies that these might be preferable to each congregation taking on the task by itself. But he knows that is not always going to be the case, so he offers a suggestion for how a congregation could do their own educational process. Here he tends to move back to the short, and perhaps too succinct, method that we have witnessed elsewhere. He offers a sample plans as follows:

If presbytery-wide training sessions are not available, a local church can easily set up its own class to prepare its officers. Elements that might be given in a typical three-hour Saturday morning class include:

- Opening Prayer
- The Nature of Church Office
  - The Call
  - The Excitement
  - The Reality
  - Keeping the Faith
- Discussion of the *Book of Order* and the Role of Governing Bodies
- Review of the *Book of Confessions*
- The Biblical Concept of Ordained Offices
- What Each Board Does in Particular
- Our Church Budget
- Questions
- Final Prayer<sup>39</sup>

There are a couple of elements here that are all too common in what we have been doing with elder education.

First, there is the time frame. One three-hour class is hardly enough time to give thorough consideration to the works mentioned. Even a cursory glance at the *Book of Order* or the *Book of Confessions* would take more time for each one than what is offered

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<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *Selected to Serve*, 20.

here for the whole process. As the Blackabys and others have stressed, spiritual formation and leadership development take place over a length of time.

Second, notice that Johnson is offering a prayer sandwich as we have seen elsewhere—prayer at the beginning, prayer at the end, but it is certainly not the substance of what is to take place during the gathering. One might suspect that both prayers together might make up less than one percent of the time spent in preparing for spiritual leadership.

Third, one should not be surprised to read further and find brief discussion points as the format to convey information. The only novelty here is that Johnson does not wait until the end of the chapter to offer them but does so at subsections along the way. The result is still a focus on the learner being able to remember and recite the answers—deep reflection is neither called for nor expected.

Johnson does a much better job when he turns to the principles of church order. He lifts up Calvin and his insistence on good order. Calvin believed that churches benefitted from having well-ordered constitutions. But while constitutions are valuable, they are not to be held so rigidly that there is no flexibility, “since they need to accommodate the customs of each nation and age and allow for the establishment of new practices in place of old ones.”<sup>40</sup> The language here reminds us of Nelson’s phrase that we are living in “ancient-future times.” Johnson goes on to explore the first four chapters of the Book of Order and the theological and historical underpinnings of the present constitution.

When he turns to the Directory for Worship, Johnson devotes a few paragraphs to “The Importance of Daily Prayer,” although given the brevity, one might question

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<sup>40</sup> Johnson, *Selected to Serve*, 40.

whether the title truly fits. Johnson sees how even pastors can get to a place where the daily routines of prayer such as those connected with corporate worship or daily meals become bland. He says that these “may recognize that they need something more profound and sustaining.”<sup>41</sup> Johnson sees a problem here, but he does not work quickly towards a solution.

Johnson even highlights the blessing that daily prayer can be:

The benefits of daily prayer are obvious: with stronger spiritual lives, we are close to God, more confident of our work, of more use to friends and family, and more mature Christ-centered people all around. Yet we constantly fall in and out of the habit. Sometimes we think we are too busy, we do not feel like it, we get mad at God, we wonder if it will do any good.<sup>42</sup>

This is not the paragraph that one might expect after someone has just discussed how important and necessary a prayer life is for the spiritual leader. To end it on such a note seems more like resignation than resolve.

He then goes on to talk about the Directory for Worship and some of its guidance on prayer. Here, too, we hear encouragement to developing a discipline of daily prayer: “An aspect of the discipline of daily person worship is finding the times and places where one can focus on God’s presence, hear God’s Word, and respond to God’s grace in prayer, self-offering, and commitment to service.”<sup>43</sup> Johnson goes on to mention that the Directory for Worship even encourages congregations to establish services of daily prayer, “although it is doubtful that many congregations do so.”<sup>44</sup> Again, we are offered a glimmer of hope that fades out before the paragraph has found its conclusion.

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<sup>41</sup> Johnson, *Selected to Serve*, 60.

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, *Selected to Serve*, 61.

<sup>43</sup> W-5.2001. Directory for Worship, *Book of Order*, PCUSA. 2011 ed., 133.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, *Selected to Serve*, 61.

Then he turns to Oswald Chambers, a master of devotional writing and prayer. Here Johnson captures some of Chamber's masterful motivation. Johnson reminds us that prayer is not intended to assist us in our work: "prayer is our work."<sup>45</sup> He quotes Chambers: "Prayer does not equip us for greater works—prayer is the great work. Yet we think of prayer as some common sense exercise of our higher powers that simply prepares us for God's work ... Prayer is the battle, and it makes no difference where you are. However God may engineer your circumstances, your duty is to pray."<sup>46</sup>

While he closes on a higher note than he has hit through his discussion, one is left to wonder why Johnson says that prayer is so important but gives it such little space. The obligatory "Questions for Study" at the end of the section do not actually invite the reader to stop and pray but simply to reflect some on the practice of prayer.

Too much time and space on information and not enough on transformation!

Steve Eason – *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*

In *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, Eason offers some real differences from the same sorts of "read the chapter, discuss the questions, repeat" that we have seen in Wright, Rice and Chinn, and Johnson.<sup>47</sup> One of the first shifts is to put the whole process within the context of community and the context of worship. In this regard, the author thinks he is on track. But in the final analysis, what Eason proposes does not fully address the issues at hand for developing spiritual leaders. Much of the material comes off as 'fill in the blank,' 'true-false,' and 'look up the page reference' sort of educational

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<sup>45</sup> Johnson, *Selected to Serve*, 62.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, *Selected to Serve*, 62.

<sup>47</sup> Steven Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders: A Manual for Developing Church Officers* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2004.)

approach. Yes, this is done with some worship and in a more collegial atmosphere than a straight lecture-test kind of model. But it seems as if the most important things are still to get across those pieces of information that are laid out in the blanks that have to be filled.

Eason highlights the unique nature of our task by stating that “we have the perfect system for building a leadership team.” He also notes that we are presented with a “teachable moment” upon which we should build.<sup>48</sup> We have a system that ensures that there is some initial investment by those who are willing to say yes to the call.

The most critical premise that Eason offers is the same foundation as this thesis: there is a difference between information and formation, and we have spent too much time on the former while barely giving a passing glance to the latter. Eason understands that a thorough knowledge of polity or a comprehensive grasp of theological doctrine are not, perhaps, the most important quality for an elder to have.<sup>49</sup> He wants to highlight spiritual development, but he immediately starts to point to a highly regimented and restricted lesson plan for that to happen. He wants spiritually mature officers, but he is not ready to let God do more in their preparation. There is not much room here for the Spirit to be at work in this ‘teachable moment.’

Eason’s vision at this point is an Old Testament image of encountering God: “Those of us who are clergy need to take our lay leaders, our team, with us to the tent of meeting.”<sup>50</sup> We need the Spirit dispensed upon us together. We need to share what we have (or what we are supposed to have), and we need what they have to offer. Regarding leadership in the church, the Bible teaches that God calls us to work and serve

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<sup>48</sup> Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Exodus 33:7ff.

together.”<sup>51</sup> Eason clearly understands the mutuality of ministry and the equality of ministry that are part of our Presbyterian system. But what he offers in the pages that follow are much more like a “training exercise” than a trip to the Tent of Meeting.

In overview, Eason proposes four three-hour sessions that each includes five components: worship, theology, dinner, polity, and small groups. Each of these components is listed with a schedule and also a one-page diagram with assignments and responsibilities for each “Training Session.” The entire process is laid out with charts and diagrams to assist the process. The structure is clear without doubt.

But Eason begins to lapse into the kind of technical-informational language and processes that he is trying to avoid. Eason makes comments such as this: “adults need at least forty-five minutes to have an educational experience.”<sup>52</sup> On one level that statement makes some sense; it is difficult to convey substantive subject matter in a few minutes. But on another level this statement seems to ignore that learning is taking place continually as the Spirit speaks and moves within us and around us. Spiritual formation often has its own time table. ‘Daily’ might be a better approach to education rather than cramming it into chronologically delineated boxes.

As one reads Eason’s work there is a constant sense that the clock must be obeyed. At one point even Eason critiques his own program as he bemoans that the longest teaching session is only forty-five minutes long.<sup>53</sup> In other words, long enough for an adult to learn something, but not a minute more. He seems to be frustrated that the course only allows for eight forty-five minute sessions which results in six hours of teaching time. This limitation is self-imposed.

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<sup>51</sup> Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, 21.

<sup>53</sup> Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, 32.

Eason's lesson plans proceed with time frames attached to each step. "*Step 1 (ten minutes)*. Welcome everyone and take of any housekeeping details as quickly as possible." "*Step 2 (five minutes)*. Have each group discuss the questions from the lesson plan." "*Step 3 (three minutes)*. Give a mini-lecture on the significance of Romans 10:9 passage from the standpoint of Presbyterian/Reformed theology."<sup>54</sup> This sounds less like an engagement with the Holy Spirit and more like a Navy training manual

Even when Eason attempts to offer an alternative schedule that could be used in a retreat setting, he is still time-bound. A retreat should have a different sense of time and place; that is precisely why it is called a retreat. But what Eason is truly proposing is more like a 'working holiday.' He states that "the downside of a retreat is the lack of reading and homework and the loss of the small-group experience."<sup>55</sup> That could be the case, but Eason's methodology comes to the fore when he notes that the shorter time frame might prevent elders-elect from "fill[ing] out the worksheets."<sup>56</sup> The author has to say that at times Eason's approach feels somewhat like spirituality by numbers.

Even in the examination to culminate the process the clock is still very much controlling the process. When it finally comes time to examine the new elders, "the examination will take about forty-five minutes." Or to put it another way—the same amount of time as everything else that Eason has proposed. He re-emphasizes the point a few paragraphs later: "The table moderator watches the clock and keeps the process moving to conclude within the time allotted."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, 37.

<sup>55</sup> Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, 23.

<sup>56</sup> Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, 24.

<sup>57</sup> Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, 62.

To his credit, Eason begins each session with worship. He mentions that worship is more than “a little devotional we check off to get our real meeting started.”<sup>58</sup> On this point the author agrees. We have had too little depth and too much expediency in terms of addressing God and allowing God to address us as we begin the process of gathering for learning and for leadership. The idea that we have a place and go to that place to meet God is a valuable addition to elder education; it is far better than simply meeting in a classroom for this purpose. Just as the Tent of Meeting was set up “outside the camp, far off from the camp” as a way to distinguish it, there needs to be some effort made to distinguish the setting in which our education will take place.

But while Eason wants to stress the place of formation within the workshops, there is a tell-tale sign of a lack of spiritual emphasis that stands out—prayer is listed as the last thing.<sup>59</sup> One might assume that there is some time for prayer during the worship, but this sounds a good bit like a fairly typical approach to prayer in mainline churches in which prayer is used as the bookend to a gathering; i.e., one prays to open the meeting in hopes that God will be present, and one closes the meeting in prayer, usually to ask God to bless what we have already decided.<sup>60</sup>

The down side of Eason’s work is that his methods seem at odds with his intent. He retains training-type language throughout. He seems overly concerned with time-frames and schedules. He looks for answers that can be as simple as fill-in-the-blank and true-or-false on matters that concern greater depth. He has worksheets for everything. Not exactly what most would consider apropos for spiritual formation.

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<sup>58</sup> Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> Eason, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders*, 43.

<sup>60</sup> Joan Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009), 72.



To his credit, he is trying to move away from simply transferring information in a totally didactic setting. He does use worship and breaking bread together and small-group dynamics as part of the structure. This is an improvement over those courses in which elders-elect gather for a brief period of discussion and then return home with more answers or assignments. He is involving the elders-elect in a longer and more diverse process than many others have proposed and implemented. He begins in the right direction, but before he gets very far he seems to be drawn back into a highly informational/technical approach that retains a great deal of the ‘training’ feel that we find in others. He has moved somewhat in the spiritual formation direction, but there is still a good way further to go.

### Communal Models

In contrast to the models we have examined thus far, there are several that take more seriously the communal nature of spiritual leadership. We are not simply spiritual leaders, but we are spiritual leaders together in a community of faith. One is not trying to improve one’s own spirituality but growing for the sake of others. The communal nature of the task comes to the fore in this section. Three works will be examined—each with a distinctive emphasis, but all with a strong sense that we are doing this together. Part of our difficulty in educating elders is that we belong to a particular, and some would say, peculiar, community. The work of the Session or board and how it does its work is the focus of this emphasis.

As has been stated earlier, we are not doing very well with “business as usual.”<sup>61</sup> Olsen notes that many of those who are leaving their positions on church boards are often

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<sup>61</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, xi.

frustrated with the experience; indeed, many of them were adamant that they would not be serving in this capacity again. What was behind the frustration? What was missing for them in their time of service? For many of them, the answer was that there was a “missing element—spirituality.”<sup>62</sup> The very thing that many of them had hoped and longed for was not present in the midst of doing the business of church. They had a sense that they had been leaders, but not spiritual leaders.

#### William Sachs – “The Religious Mission of the Board”

Why would that be the case? How did we arrive at a place where the religious board was hard to distinguish between other boards in the community? William Sachs explored that very question in “The Religious Mission of the Board.”<sup>63</sup> A large part of the answer is that for generations there was a very close tie between church and civic life in this country. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to separate the two. Historically there was a group of churches that exerted a good bit of influence in American history; these churches eventually became known as the “mainline” churches: “Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, several Baptist churches, and Methodists were joined by the Disciples of Christ and certain Lutheran churches to form a religious phalanx.”<sup>64</sup> The ways in which these churches practiced their own polity affected the political structures that came into being in the new country. Things such as representation and division of powers can be traced to their ecclesiastical beginnings of the Protestant Reformation.

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<sup>62</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, xi.

<sup>63</sup> William Sachs, “The Religious Mission of the Board” from *Building Effective Boards for Religious Organizations: A Handbook for Trustees, Presidents, and Church Leaders* Eds. David C. Hester and Thomas P. Holland. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 44.

<sup>64</sup> Sachs, “The Religious Mission of the Board,” 45.

Given these churches understood part of their role as shaping society, it became customary that the ideas of governance employed in the churches would also shape the organizations that surround them. Many other organizations took on something of a 'sacred dimension' as they were guided and directed by Christians. A close connection between social organizations and religious bodies developed, often to the point where it could become difficult to distinguish the two.

Social reliance on institutions led by boards that possess a deeply religious dimension is the legacy of this outlook. The assumptions that a group must be organized in bureaucratic form and that it must rely on a board that embodies its sacred intent have become common to all American religious movements. To understand the religious mission of the board therefore requires appreciation of the religious contours of American life.<sup>65</sup>

Sachs notes how the church shaped the culture, but he does not give sufficient exploration as to how the opposite may have also occurred. One might well argue that the generalized approach that came to be used in the broader culture has now affected the church such that people are having difficulty understanding the spiritual and religious foundations that are essential for effective church governance.

Sachs does note that "even as historical structures have faltered, a general search for authentic personal and collective spirituality has appeared." He goes on to say that while the old synthesis of religion and culture that shaped America is probably no longer viable, there is still some desire, if not need, to do so, and that a new approach to "board life" is needed.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Sachs, "The Religious Mission of the Board," 45.

<sup>66</sup> Sachs, "The Religious Mission of the Board," 46.

The old approach sought to integrate faith and life in the public sphere. The new approach is a quest to discover how “boards must embody such integration.”<sup>67</sup> It would seem that Sachs is saying what may once have been assumed as part of leadership must now be made explicit. We cannot assume that because someone has been chosen and has accepted the call to a position on the board of a religious institution that they grasp the significance of the spiritual dimension. The interplay of spiritual and secular within our history makes for as much confusion as clarity in terms of how these elements will be lived out in the work of the board.

One must not underestimate the importance of self-governance and its role in shaping our church and cultural life in America. While we do not have time here for a thorough discussion of how such factors shaped American Christianity, the critical point is that self-governance became the standard for both the fledging denominations and the social organizations that they would create. In this new milieu clergy and laity shared a good deal of authority and leadership. Boards, by whatever name, became a standard feature of organizational leadership. Members were chosen from among the organization to serve on these boards. In many ways, they embodied ideals that were common to both the growing country and the growing church.

Sachs states that “In a society where affiliation had become a matter of voluntary, personal loyalty, religious groups now had to define clearly their sense of mission.”<sup>68</sup> The mainline groups forged strikingly similar convictions and common styles of practice. Doctrinal differences remained, and still do to this day; but their practices of leadership and governance were difficult to distinguish. Certainly terminology was distinct—

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<sup>67</sup> Sachs, “The Religious Mission of the Board,” 47.

<sup>68</sup> Sachs, “The Religious Mission of the Board,” 49.

Presbyterians still cringe at the notion of having a bishop—but whether it was called a Vestry, a Session, or a Board, this grouping of congregational leaders was a central feature of church life.

This model shifted in subtle ways towards the trends of the larger culture. Efficiency became an important value; committees became a means to arrive at an efficient division of labor; agendas and Robert's Rules of Order became normative for operations. In the process, church boards began to look more and more like boards of other organizations distinguished only by the language of their mission and the terminology of their tasks. Sachs gives evidence of this shift by noting that Shailer Matthews, Dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School, said in 1912 that the work of the churches would fall short without the 'grace of committees.'"<sup>69</sup> One would be hard-pressed today to find anyone in our churches speaking of grace and committees in the same breath.

Organizational efficiency depended on boards that were filled with people with specific expertise. A church had to be able to do 'business' in the competitive environment in which people were free to associate and move from one group to another; this was a new phenomenon for the church. It is still a dynamic that is in place today.

Sachs notes that we are now in a situation where new organizational ideals and values are emerging. We are moving beyond the organizational structures that worked within the past. According to Sachs:

The new paradigm adheres to completely different standards. In this perspective, an organization must disperse authority and level hierarchy. Teamwork is valued and work is successful when performance entails a deep sense of community among those who perform the work. The new paradigm encourages authenticity, alignment, and cooperation rather than efficiency or control. Qualitative measure

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<sup>69</sup> Sachs, "The Religious Mission of the Board," 50.

now must outweigh quantitative ones. Rather than a linear sense of direction, there is reliance on developing a shared vision. Rather than a reliance on management, there is cultivation of shared leadership.<sup>70</sup>

Note the strong sense of community in Sachs' approach. This is not individuals reading chapters and then discussing them for an hour. Sachs seems to be moving towards a much more communal mode of operation. However, I would challenge Sachs on one point. A good bit of Presbyterian thought has always stressed the need for shared leadership and for a qualitative difference. The practice has not always lived up to the ideal, but the concept has been part of the Reformed faith from its inception. The better question might be what this deep sense of community among leaders looks like.

The task is to be more who we have been called to be. The task is to be more of an authentic community of faith that is living out the gospel. In Sachs' words, "More than being effective or efficient, the church must be authentic and faithful."<sup>71</sup>

One of the ways in which we do this is to model the shared nature of ministry. We recognize that individuals have certain gifts and skills, some have special education or experience that suits them to particular tasks, but we value each of those and learn to do ministry together. Rather than be 'led' by an expert, whether local or denominational, the move is to practice more partnership and teamwork:

Religious leadership has become a shared rather than an individual activity. Emphasis on specialization has diminished; leadership has become a process that seeks to elicit a shared spirituality. Leaders encourage a sense of belonging and empowerment. The focus is on group process and its goal is shared spirituality.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Sachs, "The Religious Mission of the Board," 51-52.

<sup>71</sup> Sachs, "The Religious Mission of the Board," 53.

<sup>72</sup> Sachs, "The Religious Mission of the Board," 53.

This move is further witnessed, according to Sachs, as boards become less focused on “analytical, managerial, and regulatory roles.”<sup>73</sup> How we do what we are called to do is critical to making this shift work.

If churches are to model this new way of functioning, a more effective and more spiritual way of functioning, then Sachs says “the onus of this demand falls on their boards. It is among the designated leaders that an authentic spiritual basis must be found and encouraged throughout the organization. Rather than seeking to transform society, many religious organizations and their boards now concentrate on transforming themselves.”<sup>74</sup>

In essence, we have to discover spiritual ways of conducting ourselves rather than relying on structures and processes that were the result of a different time and situation. The church today is not looking for greater efficiency—the church is looking for greater authenticity, to use Sachs’ term. Our boards are not just here to lead us into being an efficient organization but to lead us as those who embody and express the values of shared spirituality and genuine faithfulness that our members and our communities are seeking.

David C. Hester – “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith”

Hester echoes Sachs on many notes. He, too, stresses that there should be some difference in the way we operate a religious board in contrast to other settings. He, too, will emphasize the communal nature of the task.

But Hester will begin his exploration not with the historical flow of church and civic culture, but from the individual and the sense of “calling” that comes with the

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<sup>73</sup> Sachs, “The Religious Mission of the Board,” 54.

<sup>74</sup> Sachs, “The Religious Mission of the Board,” 55.

task.<sup>75</sup> In essence, people come to the boards of religious organizations because they feel a sense of purpose or are attracted to the ideals that the organization espouses. When one agrees to serve on a religious board, then one perhaps assumes that this experience will be spiritual. In other words, it is the theological perspective of this board that should yield a unique experience.<sup>76</sup>

Hester claims that this basic religious/theological difference must affect the assumptions that take place. Two assumptions are of critical importance in this regard, according to Hester. First, “all effective governance is contextual.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, all boards have their own culture, or what Hester calls ‘institutional ethos,’ or to put it in the vernacular, it is ‘the way it’s done around here.’ The second assumption is that boards must pay careful attention to the “religious or theological aspect of their work.”<sup>78</sup> While this may sound as if it should be a given, the reality is that Hester points out that in a survey of trustees of theological seminaries, most of them could not articulate how the mission of that school was used in analyzing problems or arriving at solutions. In other words, the religious character of the institutions did not greatly affect their perspectives or processes.

Hester says this is not just a feature of larger institutions but may also be in play at the local level. The explicit mission and purpose that might often be couched in terms of a mission or vision statement rarely seems to be used in the regular routines of the governing board in terms of either discerning direction or debating decisions. In Hester’s

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<sup>75</sup> David C. Hester, “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith” from *Building Effective Boards for Religious Organizations*. Eds. David C. Hester and Thomas P. Holland. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 59.

<sup>76</sup> Hester, “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith,” 60.

<sup>77</sup> Hester, “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith,” 60.

<sup>78</sup> Hester, “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith,” 61.



words: “governing boards seldom bring these statements of faith to bear in the process of decision making, which renders the congregation’s board meeting indistinguishable—except for opening and closing prayer—from any other voluntary organization’s business meeting.”<sup>79</sup>

One might say that the essence of the organization, its religious and theological base, is what is often missing in terms of how it is actually operating. As Hester notes, “to put it bluntly, trustees must be able to think theologically, to *practice* theology, if they are to make decisions as a board that are conscientiously informed by the community’s beliefs.”<sup>80</sup>

There are several reasons Hester offers for why this is the case. First, many times the core beliefs and behaviors may be more implicit than explicit, making it more difficult to know and understand the ethos. Second, there has been a ‘professionalization’ of theology that has hampered those who are not trained in theology to speak up. Third, and most importantly, due to poor educational efforts in the church we have not done a good job of passing along “the significant traditions, symbols, rituals, and beliefs that have been central to the practice of faith.”<sup>81</sup> As spiritual leaders we have not inculcated theological reflection amidst our members. One would normally assume that those charged with leading an organization would be familiar with its history and traditions and values; but apparently that would be incorrect.

To re-emphasize, Hester’s main thesis is that “practicing governance in a religious institution is a calling, an expression of the human vocation to life faithfully in the image of God, to serve God by responding with care in the matters of daily living to God’s

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<sup>79</sup> Hester, “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith,” 61.

<sup>80</sup> Hester, “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith,” 61.

<sup>81</sup> Hester, “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith,” 63.

universal love for all creation.” Or to put it in other words, “Governance is, then, a practice of faith, or if you prefer, a practice of theology.”<sup>82</sup>

The greater question, then, is how do we learn to practice governance as a spiritual practice? How does leading a church, or a portion of the church, differ from leading other boards? How do we learn to practice theology in our spiritual leadership?

The default mode of operations for many boards, even religious boards, is too often what Hester terms “technical-rational thinking.”<sup>83</sup> This way of approaching leadership says that one uses reason and knowledge as the primary means of solving any problem; solutions are arrived at by the technical application of theoretical principles. In other words, this method does not necessarily depend on God as part of the process.

In contrast to the technical-rational approach, Hester argues that we in religious boards must apply “practical reasoning.”<sup>84</sup> While he does not use the language, Hester’s practical reasoning is a way of distinguishing the language and also the mode of operation from the “business as usual” mode mentioned by others; Olsen uses the contrasting ideas of “natural leadership” as opposed to “spiritual leadership”<sup>85</sup> and Gray speaks of the difference between “rowing” or “sailing”<sup>86</sup> as a way of expressing a similar idea. In each case, there is an attempt to highlight the difference between spiritual leadership and more mundane ideas of management.

“Practical reasoning,” in contrast to “technical-rational reasoning” is much more a communal effort; it does not rely on professionals to get the job done.<sup>87</sup> This form of

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<sup>82</sup> Hester, “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith,” 63.

<sup>83</sup> Hester, “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith,” 64.

<sup>84</sup> Hester, “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith,” 65.

<sup>85</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 130.

<sup>86</sup> Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders*, 18.

<sup>87</sup> Hester, “Practicing Governance in the Light of Faith,” 65.

reasoning is mindful of the history of the institution; it remembers the stories that have shaped its past. Third, this way of thinking is as much concerned with internal effects as it is with external ends. There is a notion here that service is as important as the results; that the effect; one serves for the sake of service, not for the sake of raising more money, building more buildings, or balancing the budget. The ends may not always be achieved, but there is something that occurs for the board member that fosters growth and faithfulness. Those effects can be very difficult to measure or see, but they are an important element of this mode of operation.

Hester has done a good job of describing the difficulties of having boards or sessions function in our current context as effective spiritual leaders. There is a great tendency for us to adopt the efficiency models of operation and the technical-rational modes of thinking as we seek to do what God is calling us to do; in this regard, Hester agrees with Sachs' assessment. Many have unknowingly adopted these forms of operation and have left the theological and religious element of their life behind. Many in the church today are wrestling with how to make decisions in a difficult and dynamic context; there is a real tendency to pick up the latest 'system' that might be applied to any congregation. But the emphasis on the local, particular context is part of what makes Hester's ideas of practical reasoning so valuable. He offers at least one model by which a board or session might begin to think theologically about who they are and what they are called to do in the present moment. He stresses the fact that governance is an act of faith. The problem is that religious boards have fallen into a mode of operation that does not require faith; it functions more on information and the "technical-rational" approach to language and operations.

Charles Olsen – *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders*

Sachs has examined the history of boards in our culture, Hester has explored an alternative to the ‘rational-technical’ mode of operations, but neither of them has gone as far as Olsen in putting together and putting forth a model of operation that truly reflects the spiritual nature of the board and its work. Olsen moves the discussion away from individuals and more fully into a communal process. Olsen is intent on addressing the lack of spirituality that many perceived in their board experiences. What he proposes is not “business as usual,” but rather, “worshipful work.”<sup>88</sup> “Worshipful work” changes the focus on our efforts together away from the business modes of efficiency and moves us towards a model of operation that puts the core relationship of God to the people of God in the heart of what we are about.

It is not that Olsen ignores the individual in his discussion. The key component for the individual who has been called to leadership is an awareness of the special nature of this calling. One of the hindrances to the effectiveness of this leadership involves how the elders perceive themselves. Olsen states the following: “Self-perception is crucial. The individual board member is not to see herself or himself as merely a program manager serving the pastoral CEO or as a political representative of other interests, but as a *spiritual leader* with gifts and power to act.”<sup>89</sup> The hope is that the time of preparation will assist the individual in altering his or her perception such that he or she grasps the uniqueness of the calling.

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<sup>88</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, xii-xiii.

<sup>89</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 10.

But it is also important to maintain that spiritual focus when actually gathering together as a board. The spiritual element must be present and consistent to reinforce the perception. In this regard, it is important how one places prayer within the gathering. He is not satisfied with ‘book-end’ prayers that frame the ‘real business’ approach. He mentions a host of ways that prayer can be essential to the flow of our time together. There can be prayers of thanksgiving for God’s blessing, there can be prayers of confession for our failings, there can be prayers for guidance as we explore issues, there can be prayers as a way of taking a ‘time out’ from intense discussion, there can be prayers much as we might find within the order of our regular worship together.<sup>90</sup> His intention is to give us ways to see how this is different from the business-as-usual approach of our work together.

Olsen always contends that our spirituality is a communal experience. We are transformed together as a session when we approach our tasks in light of God’s presence in all that we do. We do not achieve the desired transformation if we do not bring the same openness to our work as we might bring to individual practices. Olsen says that “Corporate spiritual formation involves disciplines of the faith and the intention to place oneself alongside others in those disciplines.” In addition, he says that “The disciplines of scripture reading, silence, prayer, meditation, and contemplation can be corporate acts for boards.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, what works for us individually can also work for us together. There is no need to think that a session meeting cannot be a spiritual discipline, or that our time together is not about spiritual growth.

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<sup>90</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 20-25. Olsen offers several suggestions for ways in which prayer may be incorporated within the flow of the meeting. These are not necessarily scripted in advance but grow from the events within the meeting. There is both a sense of order and freedom in what he suggests.

<sup>91</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 39.

To push that point even further, Olsen takes up how one arranges the agenda for a church board meeting. Given that many leaders are looking for spiritual opportunities for growth, it is frustrating when they find the same agenda format as what they have already experienced at the library board or the board of the local United Way, for example. Citing Jesus' saying from Matthew 7:9, Olsen says the typical agenda is somewhat akin to asking for bread and being given a stone.<sup>92</sup> "Stonelike" boards do not attend to personal needs and the spiritual search that is included in that. These boards have meetings that seem repetitious and rigid. They rely on those who are verbal and speak out. They often end up rushing through decisions and rubber-stamping those that have already been made by the pastor or other leaders. In the long run, these types of boards leave leaders with little sense of participation, and thereby, a lessened sense of value.

In contrast, "breadlike" boards allow more time and space for trust to occur. They encourage time and energy to be focused on scripture and God's presence with people in community. "Breadlike" boards take time to pray and listen to God and to one another. "Breadlike" boards do not spend most of their time on operational decisions that can be handled elsewhere. In the long run, Olsen says that "'breadlike' meetings integrate inspiration with governance and feel more like 'worship' than 'meeting.'"<sup>93</sup>

One of the most important ways that a board can be "breadlike" is in its understanding of God's presence in their midst. Do they see God as the major actor in the congregation's history? Do they think of God's involvement at all? Duncan MacIntosh, an American Baptist, has made this observation:

Congregations that mention God as a player in the story tend to be congregations with vitality; they are often growing. Those that do not mention God (later

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<sup>92</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 43.

<sup>93</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 43.

stating, “We just assumed God was a player.”) tend to be lethargic, often in decline. MacIntosh concludes that something about naming God as an everyday player in the conversational stories gives permission for members to witness. They obviously believe that God is alive in their midst, and visitors who come to them pick this up. Conversely, visitors pick up the absence of God in the living memory of the other churches.<sup>94</sup>

The role that we permit God in our stories is crucial if we are to lead from a spiritual center. The history of a congregation should reflect a clear sense in how God was shaping and directing the community. If God is only a bit player, then the congregation will not be the dynamic and devoted community that God desires. Again, if the leaders are not familiar and conversant with how God is part of their congregation as a community of faith, it will be difficult to lead from a spiritual basis.

For Olsen, prayer is a critical feature both in preparation and in the ongoing life of the board. It is sad when others do not see this. He shares the story of a pastor he knows who decided to begin each board meeting with a time of prayer; many of the board simply stayed away until the prayers were over and the “real meeting” had begun. In another situation Olsen says that “One pastor says his board members openly informed him that he was not ever to call the board together for prayer because they would not come.”<sup>95</sup> When church leaders will avoid a gathering specifically dedicated to prayer, then we know we are not talking about true spiritual leadership.

Prayer, according to Olsen, will take place in one of three settings. First, there is prayer in the sanctuary with others of the gathered congregation; this is the time when communal concerns are raised together. Second, there is the smaller setting of the covenant group, or house church, or prayer circle in which there are shared stories and feelings and concerns. Third, there is the prayer closet in which one prays in solitude and

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<sup>94</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 58.

<sup>95</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 132.

perhaps even in silence. Each of these settings is essential for the church to be effective and each of the settings should be familiar to those who are called to be spiritual leaders.<sup>96</sup> One should not expect that only one setting will be sufficient for the life of prayer that a leader must have in order to do worshipful work. All three areas of prayer are valuable for the leader's life.

A final point from Olsen that bears consideration is his research on the differences between what we are including in officer preparation and what they are expecting. The general rule here is that we are doing a fairly good job of meeting the expectations for the management type activities, but we are missing expectations in the areas of spiritual disciplines. We do not have officers that are prepared for the true nature of our calling, in other words.<sup>97</sup>

Eason, Sachs, Hester, and Olsen all to some degree have moved away from the focus on the individual learning the details of the duty towards a form of leadership that takes the community more seriously. All of them highlight a different mode of operation that takes the church away from "business-as-usual" and moves it towards operating in ways that can be spiritual disciplines in themselves. Their emphasis on the communal aspect of our mutual ministry and shared spirituality is an improvement over the training models that have been used so frequently. But are there still others who have something to contribute to this conversation? What other voices are involved in the conversation about spirituality and leadership? We will turn now to some who have intentionally put those two concerns together; their results offer yet another level of depth to this conversation.

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<sup>96</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 133.

<sup>97</sup> Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 137.



## Spirituality and Leadership

We have examined some of the works that have been used to “train elders” within the church. Most of these works seem to be mostly designed to dispense information to individuals who will then be able to do the tasks that come with the duties of the office. By and large they rely heavily on didactic language that is followed by discussion questions. They are usually short, highly structured, and intended to be completed in a tight time frame.

We have also examined a few works that are more communal in nature. These works tend to emphasize that we are part of a community. The learning process takes place within more of a communal context. There are times for worship and reflection and prayer built into some of the process. The emphasis seems to be more on the group’s dynamics and how individuals will participate in the process.

We will now turn to a selection of works that emphasize the connection between formation and learning, between spirituality and leadership. These works all recognize the tensions that are present within the conversation. They all have something to say about the demands of spiritual leadership. They all intend to offer something positive in terms of how we go about the process of forming leaders who then lead from a spiritual base. Each of them reflects something of the unique perspective of the author; all of them add richly to the conversation.

As noted earlier, there are numerous definitions of leadership. Each of these authors has his or her own definition to offer. Alan Nelson defines leaders in this way:

By “leadership,” we’re referring to the social process in which people confer influence to individuals, so that those individuals can organize and assist the people in achieving what could not otherwise be accomplished. These individuals

are known as leaders. Leadership is relational. Leaders don't "do" leadership. They lead, which hopefully catalyzes the leadership process.<sup>98</sup>

Several elements of Nelson's definition are likely to be seen in other definitions. It is a social process; it is, therefore, relational in nature. Leadership leads towards some form of achievement that would not take place without it. In other words, leaders make something happen that would not without their influence. Gray echoes this idea when she says "a leader exercises authority or influence to motivate other people to follow him or her. Leadership implies movement and change."<sup>99</sup>

But this change must be accepted and agreed to by those who are to be led. Nelson reminds us that "leadership is influence that people respond to voluntarily. Anything else is coercion, not leadership. Bullies don't lead; they intimidate. Leadership is influence, but not all influence is leadership."<sup>100</sup>

But it is not enough to make people move. It is movement in a particular direction that distinguishes spiritual leadership from other ideas about leadership. The fact that we are spiritual beings lends a different perspective to the matter of leadership. Nelson says that "by 'spiritual,' we mean that every person was created with a soul—a spiritual dimension that exists in addition to the body and mind. This is what the Bible refers to as being made in the image of God."<sup>101</sup> Gray says that "spirituality is not a separate piece of life that we plug in when we have the time or feel like it."<sup>102</sup> In other words, there is a wholeness to the spiritual life that includes all that we are. This element

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<sup>98</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 19.

<sup>99</sup> Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders*, 3.

<sup>100</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 19.

<sup>101</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 19-20.

<sup>102</sup> Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders*, 3.

means that we will best understand spirituality and spiritual leadership in terms of this wholeness of body and mind.

Nelson goes on to say that spiritual leadership “is the intersection of the above characteristics, where individuals are spiritually in tune with God and living under his direction, as well as gifted and skilled as person of influence among others.”<sup>103</sup> In other words, spiritual leadership must always be mindful of both dimensions—the divine relationship and also the human relationship. Others pick up this same connection. Gray says that “a spiritual leader is one whose way of life is centered in relationship to the God revealed in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>104</sup> To be more specific, Gray says that “a spiritual leader leads others to seek and do God’s will.”<sup>105</sup> The Blackabys offer a succinct definition that captures both sides of the relationship when they say that “spiritual leadership is moving people onto God’s agenda.”<sup>106</sup> How we go about doing this will need further exploration. While there seems to be some consensus about the nature of spiritual leadership among them, there are distinctive elements about how one goes about teaching or developing a spiritual leader.

Henry and Richard Blackaby – *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda*

*Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* by Henry and Richard

Blackaby notes the need for spiritual leadership in our day and the crisis of leadership that exists both within the church and in our culture.

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<sup>103</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 20.

<sup>104</sup> Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders*, 3.

<sup>105</sup> Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders*, 4.

<sup>106</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 20.

The Blackabys have observed that too much leadership within the church is aping that which is going on in culture around us. They state that many within the church have adopted wholesale the leadership principles and techniques that come from outside the church. Too many pastors are functioning more like CEOs and using business models for the church. In many churches and in the minds of many pastors and leaders the criteria for successful church leadership are “measured in terms of numbers of people, dollars, and buildings. The more of each, the more successful the pastor.”<sup>107</sup> To put it bluntly, we are counting noses rather than converting souls.

In contrast, the Blackabys say we must be focused on God’s agenda. The Blackabys return to this numerous times throughout the book. They state early on that “the key to spiritual leadership, then, is for spiritual leaders to understand God’s will for them and their organizations. Leaders then move people away from their own agendas and on to God’s”<sup>108</sup>

If spiritual leadership is getting people on God’s agenda, then the leader will have to learn how to deal with all the agendas that are present. Everyone has an agenda—something that they are driving towards. Since everyone has an agenda, it is important for the leader to be working on the right one. The Blackabys say that “wise leaders realize there is no way they can satisfy the desires of all the people who clamor for their time.”<sup>109</sup> That is true for those who serve with us guiding the church.

So we must focus on God’s agenda. Our model for this is Jesus. Jesus led in a way different from others. Jesus was solely focused on God’s agenda at all times. Jesus’

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<sup>107</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 10.

<sup>108</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 23.

<sup>109</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 202.

leadership was largely a matter of Jesus' following God's leading. The Blackabys state it this way:

Jesus has established the model for Christian leaders. It is not found in his 'methodology.' Rather, it is seen in his absolute obedience to the Father's will. Current leadership theory suggests that good leaders are also good followers, and this is particularly true of spiritual leaders. Spiritual leaders understand that God is their leader. If Jesus provides the model for spiritual leadership, then the key is not for leaders to develop visions and to set the direction for their organizations. The key is to obey and to preserve everything the Father reveals to them of his will.<sup>110</sup>

In essence, they are claiming that true spiritual leadership is not forging out into the unknown and getting others to go with us, but rather, to follow in paths of obedience and faithfulness that we have already seen in Jesus. It is a different kind of leadership than what the world might expect.

Here is the core of the Blackabys' contribution to this thesis. If spiritual leadership is something different than secular leadership, then one would suspect that the process to achieve it is somewhat different as well. The Blackabys say that it is as much a matter of personal development as it is leadership development. There is a strong connection between the character of the leader and the effectiveness of leadership. That connection is made clear here:

The greatness of an organization will be directly proportional to the greatness of its leader. It is rare for organizations to rise above their leaders. Giant organizations do not emerge under pygmy leaders; therefore, the key to growing an organization is to grow its leaders. Certainly leadership involves some specific skills, but ultimately leadership is more about 'being' than about 'doing.' Leadership development is synonymous with personal development.<sup>111</sup>

It is easy to see how personal development and spiritual formation might be connected.

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<sup>110</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 28.

<sup>111</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 30.

After exploring stories of various leaders who were not necessarily church leaders, the Blackabys add the critical element that permits the kind of personal development that is crucial for spiritual leadership: the presence of the Holy Spirit. They note that Oswald Chambers has wisely pointed out that “there is no such thing as a self-made spiritual leader.”<sup>112</sup> It is only through the presence of the Holy Spirit that we are able to discern God’s agenda in our organizations and in our lives.

God not only works to develop our character, God sets the agenda of how that is to happen. But one has to be ready to work under God’s guidance and direction: “The fact that God can bring character development and personal growth out of any situation is conditional on people’s willingness to submit to God’s will. God is sovereign over every life, but those who yield their will to him will be shaped according to his purposes. When God directs a life for his purposes, all of life is a school.”<sup>113</sup> This sounds radically different than those who suggest discussion questions at the end of the chapter such as we saw in the training models, or Eason who seems bound to forty-five minute segments.

The Blackabys also say that great assignments will require great character and that God is the one who will build the character necessary for the task. Here they offer two caveats that are instructive for those who are preparing for spiritual leadership. First, “character building can be a slow, sometimes painful process.” This is in contrast to much of the materials that assume that becoming an elder is simply a matter of transferring knowledge. Second, the Blackabys say that “character building takes time.”<sup>114</sup> Again, this emphasizes the point that the shortest, quickest route to the end may not be the most advantageous. He goes on to say that this time requirement allows two

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<sup>112</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 42.

<sup>113</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 43.

<sup>114</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 54.

things to develop: “trust in God and obedience to God.” This is at the heart of spiritual leadership. One cannot influence others to adopt God’s agenda if one has not already done so.

In addition to being aware of our own agendas as well as the agendas of those around us, spiritual leaders also need to cultivate healthy routines.<sup>115</sup> Routines can be seen as an unpleasant monotony of repetition, but routines can also be a means of pacing ourselves in a world that is trying to run at breakneck speed. One routine that needs to be in place here is for the spiritual leader to be taking time on a regular basis for spiritual health. It is this spiritual discipline that leads to the personal development that leadership requires.

The Blackabys point to Jesus’ schedule which, while it varied every day with the events and experiences that were taking place, also had a great deal of consistency. Jesus would rise early to pray on a regular basis (Luke 6:12; 21:37; 22:39, Mark 1:35); Jesus would also pray late at night. The emphasis here for other spiritual leaders is the need to “schedule regular and frequent times alone with their heavenly Father.”<sup>116</sup>

To put it even more strongly, the Blackabys state that “spiritual leaders understand that if they neglect their relationship with God, they forfeit their spiritual authority. Time spent in God’s presence is never wasted. Everything spiritual leaders do should flow out of their relationship with God.”<sup>117</sup>

This should go without saying, but it may not be the practice of many who are leaders in the church; the Blackabys go on to say that “few spiritual leaders would openly

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<sup>115</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 206.

<sup>116</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 207.

<sup>117</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 212.

question their need to spend time in prayer. Their lifestyle, however, would indicate they resent spending much time communing with God.”<sup>118</sup>

It is probable that the Blackabys would say that one cannot become a spiritual leader or perform effective spiritual leadership unless one has a regular routine of prayer. One must take the time or make the time to spend with God to know and understand God’s agenda. In a world where the demands for our time are already stressed to the point where there is no such thing as ‘free time,’ then it becomes all the more important that spiritual leaders develop and maintain a discipline of regular, daily prayer. Their leadership depends on it.

Joan Gray – *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders: A Handbook*

Joan Gray is another writer who has done a good bit about leadership, especially within the Presbyterian Church USA. She has recently offered forth *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders: A Handbook*. Gray sees and states the problem much as others have done: there is a spiritual side of what we are called to do and that requires we do things a bit differently. But this book fails to offer as much as one might hope for. There is not a great deal here about how one practices spiritual leadership; there is not much that one will turn to again and again here. While it speaks of the different nature of what we are doing, it tends to do so in much the didactic-technical sort of way that is so common in other works. There is a great deal of discussion about the nature of the tasks at hand, but not much in terms of different or devotional ways that one might do them. At the end of each chapter are the obligatory “QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION” (Given in all caps so that we know how important they are!), but no real practices to

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<sup>118</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 213.



explore how one might actually employ anything that has been offered. Here again is the common pattern found elsewhere: Read a chapter, talk about it.

Gray's greatest offering in this book is the imagery of whether we are going to be rowing the boat or allowing the wind to drive the sails. It does not take a great deal of imagination to see the contrast: rowing is compared to human energy, effort, and expertise, and we row the boat according to our own abilities in the direction of our own choosing; it is a slow and laborious mode of operation, but one that guarantees control and predictability. Gray says that God has "given the church a basic agenda (for example, to make the world a better place, save souls, help the poor, spread Christian truth, etc.) and then left it up to the church to get on with it. The dominant attitude in this congregation is either '*We can do this*' or '*We can't do this.*'"<sup>119</sup> The focus of discussion tends to gravitate towards what kinds of resources in terms of people, money, buildings, and the like are available to do the task. Leadership in this situation might tend to become much more like management with the objective set in light of what's humanly available. It does not require a great deal of vision or depth of conviction to execute the plan. Gray would say that this is not true spiritual leadership.

The other possibility is that of operating like a sailboat. The basic attitude here is to say that "God can do more than we can ask or imagine."<sup>120</sup> Rather than looking around and counting up heads or balance sheets, this mode looks to God who is able to provide things that are not yet in place. It is much more like an adventure than an activity. It is this adventurous attitude that invites trust and reliance of God as the leader.

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<sup>119</sup> Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders*, 18.

<sup>120</sup> Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders*, 19.

The driving question for a “sailboat church” is, “What is God leading us to be and do now in the place where we find ourselves?”

Sailing is an enterprise that is much more dependent on an awareness of the conditions and circumstances in which one finds oneself. The winds are not always the same; they do not always blow in the same direction; the course may sometimes require numerous tacks to get to the destination. Rowing merely requires a direction and a set of oars—you go no faster than your own strength will take you. Jesus said that “Spirit blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.”<sup>121</sup> To live by the Spirit is to give ear and eye to the wind and follow where God leads.

Gray says that we can begin to assess which way we are operating by looking at our agenda. She says that the typical “rowboat” Session agenda is written down and follows a predictable course of items. There will be reports by various individuals or committees, there will be decisions or recommendations to make, there will be motions and seconds and votes, there will be time for old business or new business. Gray says that “Suggesting that God might be a very present and active participant in the proceedings of a session or deacon’s meeting would be as incongruous to many officers as suggesting that one of the portraits of long-dead pastors on the wall of the session room might come to life and begin to speak.”<sup>122</sup>

Gray says the second reality that indicates one is in a sailboat church is the awareness of God’s potential for the impossible. Here she uses the example of Gabriel’s

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<sup>121</sup> John 3:8.

<sup>122</sup> Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders*, 20.

response to the questioning Mary, “For nothing will be impossible with God.”<sup>123</sup> Coming to grips with God’s great power is the second side of learning to sail rather than to row. God has greater potential than we imagine, but we must be willing to allow God to dictate the directions and decisions if that is to be the case for us and our church.

Gray goes on to say that the rest of the book is about learning to be sailors in a sailboat church. That may well be the intention, but the rest of the book sounds more like a Navy training manual than an actual voyage. There is a good bit of detail and discussion about sailing, but that is not the same as taking the tiller and trimming the sails. One does not learn to sail by reading about it. One can only learn to sail by being in the boat and setting out on the open water. This book tends to keep too close to shore for its purpose.

One hopes that Gray will eventually let loose the sails and allow the ship to set forth. But when we get to “The Care and Feeding of Spiritual Leaders” we find more of the same. Even the title of the chapter suggests that this is more like a “how-to” manual than a work on spiritual formation. She recounts short stories of those who have served as elders and come away from the experience drained and perhaps disillusioned. She is starting in the same place that several others have been in terms of wanting more for our elders. But in the long run this chapter seems to be too short and too shallow to do what she desires.

Gray claims that the “amount of time invested in training and providing continuing education for officers is a good indication of the degree to which pastors and sessions value the ministry and leadership of lay leaders.”<sup>124</sup> Olsen and Eason and others,

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<sup>123</sup> Luke 1:37.

<sup>124</sup> Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders*, 101.

this author included, agree with that statement; that is at the heart of the thesis of this project. But in the same paragraph Gray reveals a fairly typical approach to the task. She says that “Officers being newly ordained need a minimum of ten to twelve hours of training.” She is asking for more than some of the training models, but she is not thinking in terms of the broad scope the Blackabys have proposed. She, like so many others, thinks that this short span is sufficient to the task. If all we are doing is working on learning the details of some of the constitution and local church processes, then this may work. For there to be real change and movement towards a deeper and more devoted spiritual life, then this seems to short the task in a serious way. There is no mention here about daily disciplines or practices that would sustain spiritual growth. There is no mention here about the content of these ten to twelve hours.

The other problem in her suggestion is that she thinks previously ordained elders should only be attending at those places where appropriate. In fact, she says that when we are “persuading veteran elders to attend training, it is helpful to remind them that the *Book of Order* has changed since they last served.”<sup>125</sup> The implication of this statement is that the *Book of Order* is what is at the heart of elder training and that a refresher course is sufficient for those who have served before. In other words, little preparation is required when one has already served.

The most spiritually satisfying portion of Gray’s book is where she takes the story of manna in the wilderness and uses it as an illustration of how we are to do spiritual practices daily. It is somewhat strange that it takes until the final chapter to arrive at this point. One would have thought that this aspect of spiritual formation would have been

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<sup>125</sup> Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders*, 101.

lifted up numerous times before this point. More attention to this would have improved the chapters that tended to sound as if they were all about management.

But we might have a glimpse of Gray's own spirituality when she says that "Unfortunately the majority of the books about spiritual nurture have been written by people who meet God best in silence and solitude." She then offers the guidance that "the best practice is to find your best and most effective way to be in communion with God and practice it as often as possible."<sup>126</sup> We can gather that for Gray practices of silence and solitude are not her preferred modes of formation. But rather than pointing to their value through the years, she discounts them because they are not essential for her.

Gray is starting on the right track, but she has not completed the journey with this offering. There are several glimpses of good things such as her analogy of whether we are rowing or sailing the ship, and whether we are gathering manna daily. But by and large this work does not offer a great deal in terms of spiritual practices. It tends much more towards read the chapter and discuss the questions at the end model. She lifts up prayer and discernment and other practices, but then gives no practical guidance on how to grow in those. It is one thing to speak of sailing the ship and quite another to get a hand on the tiller and feel the power involved.

#### Alan Nelson – *Spirituality and Leadership*

As we have seen with others, Nelson will keep the tension between the divine and the human in terms of spiritual leadership. He says that spiritual leadership "is the intersection ... where individuals are spiritually in tune with God and living under his

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<sup>126</sup> Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Leaders*, 110.

direction, as well as gifted and skilled as a person of influence among others.”<sup>127</sup> The leader is influenced primarily by God, but then that Godly influence affects the human community in which the leader operates. One must have both elements present to be a spiritual leader.

Nelson notes that there are some elements of leadership that seem to be contrary to genuine spirituality; there is an element of power that is always present in leadership, while the element of humility might be missing. The balance of the two is not easily achieved, although it is precisely what Nelson, and so many others, are seeking. Nelson says that “Someone who can’t control himself or herself shouldn’t be entrusted with the charge of leading others. But the paradox of Biblical spirituality is that this self-control cannot be self-induced.”<sup>128</sup> Or to phrase it another way, Nelson claims, “Self-discipline is a misnomer when applied to spiritual life.”<sup>129</sup>

The true spiritual leader will understand the communal nature of power and how it will be used within the community. Power is a wonderful thing within the proper bounds. Electricity can do wonders, but it can also kill in an instant. Dynamite can move mountains, but it can also destroy more than intended when mishandled. In a similar way, Nelson points out that we as Christians have a different view of how to handle power. Jesus had incredible power but was willing to give that power away for a season to take on the role of a servant. In Nelson’s words, “Leading is about obtaining power, and accumulating influence. But leadership changes when it intersects with spirituality.

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<sup>127</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 20.

<sup>128</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 56.

<sup>129</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 56.

Then leadership includes strategically giving up human elements in order to obtain spiritual ones. The ability to do this has a lot to do with self-image.”<sup>130</sup>

Here is precisely where the spiritual leader’s self-image will be different from that which is commonly used in the broader culture. Nelson says that “Spiritual leaders see themselves primarily as servants, not leaders. Leading is merely a tool God has entrusted with us to use as a vehicle to serve others.”<sup>131</sup> In even more vivid terms, he says “In God’s plan, everyone wears the same uniform, because everyone holds the same position—servant. If we have this attitude, then when we’re not leading we maintain our identity; we don’t think of ourselves as leaders but as servants. Servant leaders are servants who merely use leading as a tool for serving others.”<sup>132</sup>

Nelson spends more time and energy on the connection that allows this type of leadership to happen. He focuses on the conduit for our leadership when he states that “Spiritual leaders rely heavily on the power of prayer. Prayer is the primary connection that allows us to receive God’s Spirit, which enables us to be spiritual. It’s akin to filling your car with gas.”<sup>133</sup> Prayer as a means of leadership is something that Nelson values highly.

But that is not to say that this comes easy for leaders—on the contrary, Nelson says that this is a continual challenge: “The challenge of prayer for leaders is that people who are gifted at leading tend to find the process of being still before God a tortuous one. They would rather just do something and hope that God blesses it. Leaders tend to be go-getters who are tempted to rely on their own gifting. As a result, most spiritual leaders

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<sup>130</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 64.

<sup>131</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 70.

<sup>132</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 71.

<sup>133</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 76.

have to work hard at their prayer life, constantly governing their desire to act before spending adequate time in prayer.”<sup>134</sup>

However, this act of prayer is essential if one is to practice true spiritual leadership. Here is one of the flaws of how many seem to approach prayer in terms of their spiritual leadership of the church. Time spent in prayer, in silent reflection, in sharing stories, in listening quietly for God to speak is often seen through the lens of efficiency that the church has adopted from the world around us.

There are many reasons why leaders may have difficulty with prayer. Leaders are usually self-reliant and action oriented. Time spent in more quiet and contemplative attitudes may be a strain for them. Leaders tend to have many demands on their time already. The unspoken thought is that multi-tasking is to be valued in our fast-paced world. So it may not be easy to develop a deeper prayer life given the traits of many leaders and the time frames of modern life.

But there is a critical reason that Nelson focuses on the leader’s prayer life: “*Prayer can’t be delegated.*” (emphasis added)<sup>135</sup> In other words, while others may take on many tasks, no one else can accomplish this deeply personal practice. Someone else can do the budget, or fix the lights, or teach Sunday School, or keep up the Website, but no one else can pray in place of the leader. It is an essential task for spiritual leadership. In a wonderful turn of phrase, he says that we must devote time to our “invironment.”<sup>136</sup> That is to say, we need time and space for working on what is going on internally as well as handling the externals.

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<sup>134</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 76.

<sup>135</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 88.

<sup>136</sup> Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 101.



All of those who have focused on spirituality and leadership in the end put a good bit of stress on the role of prayer in the leader's life. Gray lifts up the need but does little to instruct us in the practice. One could gather from her comments that she is not always ready for the type of quiet, contemplative practice that has been a foundation for spiritual leadership for centuries. While the title suggests that there will be a good bit of spirituality within the volume, the content tends more towards the managerial.

The Blackabys' offering is excellent in balancing spirituality and leadership. The highlight here is the emphasis on character and that it takes time for that to happen. While they use numerous examples of leaders in other settings, the spiritual nature of leadership is always to the fore. Their offerings on the preparation of the leader are insightful. Their insistence on the Holy Spirit as an active participant in the process is also a welcome addition that is overlooked in the works of others.

Nelson's focus on prayer for leaders is critical. A practice of prayer will be at the heart of the spiritual leader's agenda. Only by spending time in conversation with God and listening to God will the leader be able to balance the divine and the human. That prayer is something that cannot be delegated is one of the best insights any of these authors have put forth.

To review the literature of prayer is beyond the scope of this present chapter. That prayer is an essential element of spiritual leadership has been borne out even by those who did not give it the attention that it deserves. When we move past the models that are too focused on efficiency and easy answers, we see that spiritual leadership requires a life of prayer, a life of continual communion with God.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRAYERFUL PREPARATION PROJECT

We have seen that there is a good bit of material concerning elder education that is much more didactic than devotional, much more discursive than dialogical. The emphasis on information transfer has been in place for quite some time. The tendency has been to approach this task within a short time frame looking for short answers. But does such an approach produce the effects that will most benefit the elders elect and the Sessions and church they serve? Will this “short and sweet” methodology help elders elect to become better spiritual leaders?

The approach that is taken here is one in which the focus is on the dialogue with God and others that will produce spiritual formation over the course of time. The intent is that there will be an ongoing conversation that has the potential for transformation. The intent is that there will be a real opportunity for faith development rather than just a time to learn the rules and regulations within the Book of Order. The practices involved will ask the elders elect to spend time daily in Bible Study, prayer, and reflection. By employing a different approach with different activities than the typical elder education course, the hope is that we will help to produce a different kind of elder—one who leads from a deep relationship with God rather than from a cursory knowledge of the rules.

There will be several steps in this project. The first will be the creation and completion of a survey instrument of both pastors and elders within the Presbytery of East Tennessee. The second will be the creation and execution of a new curriculum for elder education that will be used in Mars Hill Presbyterian Church. The third phase will

be an evaluation of that curriculum seeking to see the impact this new model may produce. We will examine the various instruments used along the way.

### The Surveys

The first phase of the Prayerful Preparation Project is the execution of a survey instrument to learn about current practices and perceptions from a variety of churches. These churches are all members of the Presbytery of East Tennessee, a mainline middle governing body composed of approximately 75 churches. The Presbytery of East Tennessee includes churches that are large and small, urban and rural, old and new. The intent of the survey is to include a variety of churches, pastors, and elders from within this body.

### Clergy Survey

Twenty pastors, or teaching elders as the new Book of Order language employs, were asked to participate in the project. There was an effort made to include both male and female pastors, urban and rural pastors, those with long experience and those who are just starting out. Of those asked, ten responded with completed surveys. The clergy survey asked questions concerning the church setting, the description of current elder education practices, the level of satisfaction with current elder education, and the spiritual disciplines of the pastor.<sup>1</sup>

One might ask why survey pastors on this matter. Because teaching elders and ruling elders share responsibilities and ministries within the church, one would hope that they share similar spiritual practices as well. The idea that teaching elders are somehow

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<sup>1</sup> See APPENDIX ONE: CLERGY SURVEY. Page 149.

more “spiritual” than their flocks would be contrary to Reformed doctrine. If we are responsible for similar tasks, then one would expect that there would be similar practices.

The Clergy Survey and a table of results are included are appendices. There are, however, several items of note that need to be mentioned here.

The clergy surveyed have a regular pattern of prayer. Two indicated that they prayed several times per day; four indicated that they prayed at least once per day; four indicated that they had structured times of prayer at least several times per week. In other words, prayer is a regular discipline for the clergy, and for the majority of them it is a daily discipline. The survey did not attempt to illicit the exact structure or pattern that pastors used for their prayer. From the fact that none of the clergy indicated “fixed hour prayer” as part of their spiritual disciplines, it could be assumed that their pattern of prayer is something less extensive. The time set aside for prayer varied. Half of those surveyed prayed in the morning, while the rest were evenly split between noon, evening, or night.

The clergy are also frequently reading the Bible. When asked about their private Bible reading, five out of ten said that they had daily private Bible time, while another five indicated that they read the Bible several times per week. In contrast to time for prayer, the overwhelming majority of clergy did their Bible reading in the mornings, presumably before the demands of the day crowded in.

In terms of spiritual practices, the clergy were consistent in prayer and Bible reading, with devotional reading also playing a role for most. Other spiritual disciplines were indicated to a lesser extent with meditation, silence, and solitude being employed by

a few clergy. There were several spiritual disciplines that were not indicated at all in the survey: spiritual direction, centering prayer, fixed-hour prayer, and fasting.

The more intriguing results from the survey concerned the clergy's perceptions about their own practices of elder education. Most of these churches are doing a few short sessions of elder education. Five churches were doing only one or two sessions of education; three churches were doing three or four sessions, while only one church was doing more than eight sessions. In terms of the length of sessions, short also seems to be the operative word. A couple of churches indicate only doing one hour sessions, while four indicate doing two hours sessions, two more are doing three hour sessions, and one church indicated doing a half-day format. It should be noted that the church doing more than eight sessions is only doing one hour sessions; they have a format of doing their elder education during the Sunday School setting for the fall quarter. In other words, none of them are devoting a great deal of time to the task.

The lack of time and effort to the task may be part of the reason that only half of the clergy responded that their level of satisfaction with the process was good. Four clergy indicated that their level of satisfaction was only average. It should be noted that the one clergy who responded with an excellent sense of satisfaction with the educational process is the one whose church uses the longest format for elder education. In other words, there may be a connection between the time invested and the sense of satisfaction achieved. Correspondingly, the clergy's sense of elder preparedness is virtually identical to their satisfaction with the process.

Another element from the clergy survey is that eight out of ten indicate they do an actual examination for incoming officers, while two indicate that they do not. This is a

constitutional requirement that is either being overlooked or ignored to some extent. It should be noted that both those churches that did not indicate they do exams are smaller congregations with newly installed leadership; in other words, either their church style may be more informal or they are still feeling their way in the new relationship.

When asked what they might change about their present process of elder education there were a variety of answers but also some similarities. One stated that “the time spent needs to be more interactive and less didactic.” That, of course, is a crucial element of this thesis-project. Coming from a clergy who is responsible for leading the process this may indicate a desire for more participation and engagement from the elder side of the equation. A passive mode of learning does not encourage the teacher, nor does it indicate that the subject matter is considered of great value by the student.

Several clergy also made comments concerning the time involved. One indicated that she would prefer “a little more time each session.” This is not uncommon in today’s hectic world. Another clergy put it in these terms; this leader would “have more sessions where we could do more in-depth study, reflection.” There seems to be a connection between devoting time to the process and being satisfied with what is accomplished. This would hearken back to the law of slow growth.<sup>2</sup> It takes time for the processes of reflection and growth to occur. The type of education and formation we seek is not found on a short schedule. Another clergy said that the process would be better if it were longer. This clergy indicated a desire for having elder education “multiple times throughout the year (have two retreats/year).”<sup>3</sup> All of these comments point to the fact

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Murray, *Andrew Murray on Prayer* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1998), 201. Also see Chapter Two.

<sup>3</sup> See APPENDIX TWO: CLERGY SURVEY RESULTS. Page 153.

that there is a sense of time compression involved here, or at least, that there is a desire for a greater amount of uninterrupted time to devote to the task.

### Elder Survey

It was requested of those pastors completing the survey that they also forward a survey instrument for elders to their Sessions for participating in this study. This would give a broader picture of elders and their spiritual practices as well as their thoughts concerning their own elder education. There were seventy-three total responses to the elder survey; sixteen of which were from Mars Hill Presbyterian Church.

The elder survey differed from the clergy survey in regards to questions concerning elder education. The intent was to discover their own sense of preparedness for assuming the office as well as to explore what they were looking for in elder education. The same questions were used concerning spiritual practices as had been used for the clergy survey.<sup>4</sup>

The intent of surveying elders from other congregations is to have some basis for comparison between where we are in our congregation and where others are within similar settings. Again, this survey was created specifically for this thesis-project. The Elder Survey as well as the results are included as appendices.

There are items that need to be noted. First, the elders surveyed maintain a consistent attendance in worship. Thirty-nine report attending worship every week, thirty-two report attending nearly every week, and three indicate they attend at least two to three times per month. There were none who reported attending less than once per month. Worship is obviously important to this group of elders.

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<sup>4</sup> See APPENDIX THREE: ELDER SURVEY. Page 156.

This group of elders is also committed to regular, structured prayer. Twenty-one report praying structured prayers several times per day; thirty report using structured prayer at least once per day; fifteen pray on a weekly pattern, and only three report praying less than once weekly. The results indicate that more than two-thirds of those reporting have a daily discipline of prayer.

When we come to reading the Bible we find that commitment is somewhat less. Twenty-two indicated that they read the Bible at least daily; ten indicated they read their Bible several times per week; seventeen indicated at least weekly, but nineteen indicated that they read the Bible less than once per week. One might have suspected that the disciplines of prayer and Bible reading would have shown a strong similarity, but this survey indicates less emphasis on the Bible in personal practices.

In terms of using a guide for prayer, the elders indicate by a better than two to one margin that they did not use any guide for their prayer life. The numbers for those who use a guide for prayer and for those who pray more than once per day are virtually the same. Those who have some resource by which to structure their prayer life, whether it be a daily devotional or some other guide to prayer, tend to pray more often than those who do not employ such a guide. If there is no pattern by which to pray, then prayer tends to be more sporadic.

Most of these elders, however, are satisfied with their prayer lives. Forty-six indicate they are at average or above with their sense of satisfaction while only twenty-one chose either fair or poor.

It is interesting that those responding indicated that they were prepared for service on Session in greater numbers. Sixty-two indicated that their level of preparedness was



average or above with twelve indicating that they were excellently prepared for their office. The difference between this answer and their satisfaction with their prayer life would indicate that there is some disconnect between those two elements; in other words, they consider themselves more ready to serve than they are pleased to pray.

Another item of note is the preferred foci of elder education. While most of the clergy would spend more time on the Constitutional elements, the elders surveyed indicated more interest in Bible Study, prayer, and duties of elders. The preferences for Bible study and prayer were virtually similar—twenty-eight and twenty-seven, respectively. While the item most-sought emphasis in education was the Duties of Elders with forty-two indicating this as their preference. This suggests that incoming elders want to know what they have to do—in other words what tasks are expected of them. But also they have a hunger for something more spiritual than learning about the documents of the organization. The difference between what elders are asking for and what clergy are providing must create tensions in the process, probably for both sides. None of the clergy indicated spending more than fifteen percent of their educational time on Bible study. Some clergy indicated that they spend no time on prayer in their elder education, while others indicated that it was a small percentage of the total time devoted to the task.

When asked about their personal spiritual practices most responded that prayer, Bible reading, and devotional reading were the most common, with all respondents indicating that they participate in these practices at least weekly. Service also garnered numerous responses, although the frequency was not marked by many. Those who indicated that silence or solitude was a spiritual practice were ten and nine respectively.

As with the clergy, there were several practices that were not employed at all or very rarely: journaling, centering prayer, fixed-hour prayer, and fasting.

The surveys indicate that there are similarities in the spiritual practices of teaching elders and ruling elders with prayer, Bible study, and devotional reading being those most indicated. The practices that are not employed are also similar. Perhaps the most telling point on the survey is that ruling elders are looking for more Bible study and prayer in their preparation than they are receiving.

#### Description of the Prayerful Preparation Project Implementation

While it was possible to explore a broader base for purposes of understanding the spiritual practices of teaching and ruling elders, the implementation of the project was done on a smaller scale within Mars Hill Presbyterian Church. Mars Hill is governed by a Session comprised of twelve members of three rotating class of four elders each. Therefore, in a typical year there is the need to educate and prepare another four elders for service. That would be a small sampling size, so the project was used over the course of three elder education classes which included fifteen elders since some were called upon to replace those who left their offices before their terms expired. Each class included some who had been previously ordained as well as those who were coming to office for the first time. Each class also included both male and female elders elect.

There were a variety of backgrounds represented in the classes as well. Rather than a group of "Cradle Presbyterians" (those who have been brought up exclusively in the Presbyterian Church USA), there was a mix of denominational backgrounds. Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, and Catholic upbringings were present in the three classes. This is consistent with what we learned from the surveys about elders

within the Presbytery of East Tennessee. One cannot assume a Reformed or Presbyterian foundation from which to work even within a Presbyterian church.

Given that developing a dialogue takes some time, the course was scheduled to take place over the course of six weeks, although in each section that was reduced to five gatherings to allow for conflicts within the group's schedule. This also meant that there might be a week or two gap in the scheduled gatherings, rather than consecutive sessions on a weekly basis. Each gathering would last from one and a half to two hours. The gathered time for the project would be between eight and ten hours. This schedule represents a serious investment of time and attention.

The more critical pieces of the Prayerful Preparation Project, however, are the studies and prayers that are to take place apart from the gatherings. The intent is to extend the conversation into a daily office or offices in which the elders elect would spend more time in conversation with God. The intent is that elders elect would be spending between half-an-hour and an hour a day in Bible study and prayer. Over the course of five weeks that would mean approximately five to eight hours per week devoted to the task; that would be a marked increase over what is taking place now in most churches within the presbytery. These Bible Studies and Offices of Prayer will be described in greater detail below.

### Prayerful Preparation Project Components

The Prayerful Preparation Project consists of three major components: weekly gatherings of elders elect with the pastor, daily Bible Studies for each week, and the weekly Offices of Prayer. Each one needs to be examined more fully.

## The Gatherings

Once a week our group gathered for a time of worship, prayer and discussion. These gatherings took place in an upstairs room around a large oval conference table. This room is not the usual meeting space for the Session, and there is a softer lighting in the room in the evenings when the gatherings took place. At the beginning of each gathering we would light a single candle in the center of the table as a reminder of Christ's presence with us.

The general order for the gatherings would be as follows: first, we would have a service of evening prayer which will be explored more fully below; second, we would have a time to share insights, questions, or moments of growth from the previous week's study and prayer; third, we would have time for instruction and discussion of both the spiritual practices that were being introduced as well as the pragmatic aspects of service as a ruling elder; fourth, we would have time for sharing faith stories or perspectives on the church in the world today; fifth, we would close with free prayer.

The first thing we would do together is to offer a Service of Evening Prayer.<sup>5</sup> This order of prayer was not the same as those which were part of the Offices of Prayer that elders elect had been praying through the week. This order of prayer was more responsive. The prayers of thanksgiving and intercession were written individually for each day and the Psalms and Scripture readings were likewise taken from the daily lectionary. We would include a time for sharing joys or concerns or prayer requests that the elders elect would like to lift up.

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<sup>5</sup> The Orders of Worship for these services are included as APPENDIX NINE: SERVICES OF EVENING PRAYER. See page 279.

This service of prayer would be more formal than what was included in the Offices of Prayer throughout the week. The responsive nature of the office served to draw us together at the beginning of the gathering. Responsive reading means that we have to be listening to one another and to be attuning ourselves to each others' voices and cadences. It helps to establish a worshipful atmosphere that reflects our typical use of responsive Calls to Worship in our Sunday services. The change of pace from conversation to following the office helps elders elect to enter into a more worshipful spirit and prepares us to see what we are doing together as sacred. The combination of softer light, gathering around the same table, lighting the candle, and joining together in an office of prayer gives the gathering a much keener sense of the sacred.

The service of prayer would also include time for silent meditation on the scripture. There are few times in our culture that we are encouraged to sit quietly and listen for God to speak. This element, too, reflects a time of silent confession that is a typical part of our Sunday services, and reinforces the worshipful attitude that is fostered by the order of the office. This brief silence would also reinforce the sense of silence that has been encouraged through the weekly offices.

With the first two weeks of the Prayerful Preparation Project there was included an introduction to fixed-hour prayer and an introduction to *lectio divina*. These two practices were essential elements of the weekly Bible Studies and Offices of Prayer. These two introductions were not meant to be exhaustive, but were intended to give enough background so that participants could more fully appreciate and benefit from the other materials.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Introductions are included in APPENDIX 10: INTRODUCTIONS. See page 284.

## The Bible Studies

Each week of the project includes Bible Studies created to help the elders elect spend time in Scripture and reflect on the nature of spiritual leadership within the church community.<sup>7</sup> These Bible Studies were included in a weekly packet of materials for the elders elect. The studies were printed on separate pages from the Offices of Prayer so that the participants would not think them connected to one particular office. The participants were encouraged to do the studies at the time that was most convenient for them whether that be morning or evening or perhaps even at night. This is part of the flexibility of the design.

The Bible Studies were formatted to do four things. First, the text was printed on the page so that it did not require a separate Bible, and also so that participants might feel freer about marking or making notes directly by the passage. By printing the passage it was also assured that when discussion took place in the gathering there was a common point of reference. Next, each day included instructions to do a *lectio divina* reading of the passage, so that participants might take more time and enter more deeply into the passage. Next, each day also included study questions that were designed to offer a challenge to integrate the Bible passage, the nature of leadership, and the participant's personal background and experience. Finally, each study also included the instruction for the participant to offer a prayer about what God seemed to be saying within the passage. Rather than simply 'finding an answer,' the intent is that the elders elect will be reflecting and praying more deeply about the Bible.

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<sup>7</sup> The Bible Studies are included in APPENDIX EIGHT: STUDIES AND OFFICES. See page 170.

Each week presented a different focus of passages that were chosen around a theme. The passages through the week include both Old Testament and New Testament readings so that the theme could be seen as it developed through the course of the Bible.

The first theme is The Call. All elders elect have been called by God through the voice of the congregation to a place of service and leadership. Therefore, it is important to explore the ways in which God has called others to leadership in times past. Over the course of the week the similarities and differences could be seen and highlighted. The intent is that the participants will also come to see how they have responded similarly to those in Scripture. For the first week the Scripture passages were:

- Moses and the Burning Bush – Exodus 3
- Samuel – I Samuel 3
- Isaiah – Isaiah 6
- Jeremiah – Jeremiah 1
- The First Disciples – Matthew 4
- Zaccheus – Luke 19

During the subsequent weeks the themes were:

- Turning Points, which focused on critical moments in which Biblical characters made decisions that would affect their future and the future of those around them; Abraham, Joseph, and Paul are examples of characters who faced such moments.
- Covenant, which emphasized the communal nature of our being the people of God through the ages; Abraham, Moses, and David are examples.
- Commandment, which emphasized God's call to an upright life; the Fall, the Ten Commandments, and Jesus and the Law are examples.
- The Great Ends of the Church, which underscores the tasks and activities that we are called to do as God's people; the proclamation of the Gospel, the preservation of the truth, and the maintenance of divine worship are examples.

All of these themes connect well with the nature and task of being an elder. There are certainly other texts that could also be included within the scope of this process; some might suggest that there be more texts taken from the Gospels. But the limitations of

might suggest that there be more texts taken from the Gospels. But the limitations of time necessitate that one be selective in choosing what passages would best speak to this educational and formational process.

These themes were also presented in connection with some other aspects of elder education. Covenant, for example, was the theme for the week in which we discussed the Book of Confessions in our gathering. The Book of Confessions was explored as statements of faith communities during times of crises, whether internal or external. At such times the identity and cohesion of the community is critical. Commandments is the theme for the week during which the Book of Order is discussed as our church's constitution. The Book of Order has a good bit to say about how the church must order itself so that it can live together. The Great Ends of the Church are part of what is now called the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity; they define the purpose for which the church exists.

One final note to make on Bible studies is that at the first gathering of all elder education sessions the author would place a stack of books on the table: the Bible would be on top, with the Book of Confessions next in line, and the Book of Order on the bottom. The guidance was given that this order is the preferred means of addressing every issue within the church. Part of the reason we have such problems with polity and discipline within a church is that we have not spent the time in the Bible and Book of Confessions that will create the atmosphere wherein the Book of Order might be applied with Christian compassion. Each following session the same stack would be present on the table as a reminder for all in attendance.



## The Offices of Prayer

The third major component of the project is the Offices of Prayer that were given to the elders elect.<sup>8</sup> For many this would be the first time that they encountered such offices; therefore, the first weekly gathering included a short essay about praying the offices. The intent would be that elders elect would be more intentional about prayer and develop a deeper conversation with God around the task to which they have been called.

The basic format of the offices is that it is similar to a Book of Hours that includes offices for specific times during the day. The four offices that are included are the offices of Morning, Noon, Evening and Night prayers, although the language of the Merton Book of Hours of Dawn, Day, Dusk, and Dark are a wonderfully poetic expression of the same offices.<sup>9</sup> From the outset the elders elect were told that it was not expected that they complete every service of prayer that was presented. The goal was for them to find a better rhythm of personal prayer. If their schedule allowed time for prayer in the mornings before others in household were awake or the tasks of the day impinged upon their prayer time, then the morning office would be encouraged. If the elders elect found that it was easier to pray in the evening when the working hours were over, then this could become the primary focus of their prayer practice. The elders elect were encouraged to pray at least some of the offices that may have been more difficult to pray so that they would gain some feel for the flow of prayer that was offered. Each of the offices has something of its own emphasis. The morning office would often include the

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<sup>8</sup> The Offices of Prayer are included in APPENDIX EIGHT: STUDIES AND OFFICES. See page 170ff.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Merton, *A Book of Hours* Kathleen Deignan, ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2007), 40.

Laudate Psalms.<sup>10</sup> The beginning of the day is a time to set the tone for the day to come and to attune one's attention to God. It is also a time of commitment in which we renew our sense of call to God's covenant community.

The midday office is a short office just as it would be in a monastic community. The "Little Hours" of Terce, Sext, and None,<sup>11</sup> are shorter services that punctuate the day. The readings and prayer here are usually brief. The Psalm readings are typically from Psalm 120-133; many of these are Songs of Ascent which would be used when approaching the Temple for worship. The emphasis during this office in the middle of the day was to stop work long enough to have some sense of worship. The prayers are attempts to set the work of the day in the context of God's work in us now and forever. In the midst of a busy and hectic day, a brief pause for prayer would hopefully be a moment of refocus and refreshment.

The evening office is comparable in length to the morning office. Many of those who advocate keeping at least some form of office will often recommend the morning and the evening offices as those most profitable for those practicing a daily discipline of prayer. In both the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church and the Daily Prayer book of the Presbyterian Church (USA) these two offices are given greater attention. There are a host of other prayer books that follow a similar pattern.

The evening office is a time to rest from our labors and put what we have done in the hands of God. It is a time to confess the imperfections in our work and in our lives before a gracious and forgiving God. Thus, the evening office has a reflective tone in which we remember what God has done for us this day and how we have responded. As

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<sup>10</sup> Laudate Psalms are those with a special emphasis on praise, such as Psalms 144-150.

<sup>11</sup> Latin for Three, Six, and Nine—often called "The Little Hours" of the mid-morning, mid-day, and mid-afternoon offices.

with the morning offices, the prayers intended for the evening office are influenced by the study passages for the day.

The night office is again a short office, much like the midday office. The emphasis here is on confession. There is an old proverb that says, “a clear conscience makes a soft pillow”; the hope here is for elders elect to offer up the day with all its mistakes for God’s blessing. The intent is to leave this day behind and rest in God’s care. The other aspect of the night office is to entrust ourselves and those we love to God; here, too, one will sometimes find the inclusion of Benedict’s instruction to remind ourselves daily that we are going to die.<sup>12</sup>

This project is intended to be flexible enough for elders elect to fit it into already busy schedules, but also challenging enough to call forth some effort and energy on their part to follow it. Neither in its design nor its implementation is it draconian; the aim is to achieve something akin to what Benedict laid out in his rule: “In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome.”<sup>13</sup>

### Follow-up Instruments

The third phase of the Prayerful Preparation Project was to survey elders who had participated in the course and assess their perspectives and practices. As with the Clergy and Elder Surveys, this survey was created specifically for this project. The survey single page paper survey which was given to elders who could answer it anonymously; it was distributed in January, 2012 with elders having ten days to respond; the last day to

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<sup>12</sup> St. Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*. Timothy Fry, O.S.B., ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), (4:47), 13.

<sup>13</sup> St. Benedict, *The Rule*. Prologue, 5.

respond was January, 22, 2012. This survey was administered only to those who had participated in the Prayerful Preparation Project.<sup>14</sup>

The survey employs a five point Likert scale that moves from “strongly disagree” to “disagree” to “neutral” to “agree” to “strongly agree.” The survey would be scored by assigning values to the responses with “strongly disagree” being a minus two, “disagree” being a minus one, “neutral” being zero, “agree” being a plus one, and “strongly agree” being plus two. The responses would indicate a shift either towards the positive or the negative or no movement at all. In addition to the scaled questions, elders were given the opportunity to offer free responses to questions about the project.

Of the fourteen elders elect who participated in the Prayerful Preparation Project nine completed surveys.<sup>15</sup> One would hope for a better participation in a congregational setting, but as with other aspects of church life, one hundred percent participation is rare indeed.

Several results bear noting. First, when asked about any hesitancy to answer the call to church leadership there was no strong indication of either agreeing or disagreeing. Three replied that they disagreed, while four agreed, but none of them strongly so. The resulting value of plus one indicates that this was not a critical point for participants.

There were several items on which there was a slightly positive result. Participants were more likely to agree that spiritual leadership is different from other forms of leadership and that the church is a unique organization. Again the numbers are

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<sup>14</sup> The Prayerful Preparation Project survey is included as APPENDIX FIVE: PRAYERFUL PREPARATION SURVEY. See page 163.

<sup>15</sup> The full table of results are included as APPENDIX SIX: PRAYERFUL PREPARATION SURVEY RESULTS. See page 165.

not major shifts with a plus five for spiritual leadership being different, and a plus six for those thinking that the church is a unique organization.

Three other questions revealed similar levels of positive responses. When asked about whether the project had inspired participants to want to learn more, or if they had learned new ways to pray, or if they felt they were more sensitive to God's leading, by a small margin more "agreed" but three remained "neutral" on those questions. One of the hopes of elder education is that elder continue to want to grow and believe themselves more sensitive to God's direction. That there was not a stronger response on those questions seems to indicate that the project did not do a compelling job with those aspects.

There were some areas where there seemed to be movement in a positive direction as a result of the course. Each of them deserves more careful consideration.

When asked whether they had learned more about their church through the Prayerful Preparation Project every respondent agreed. There were no "strongly agree" responses but neither were there any responses on the negative side of the scale. Everyone learned something about our congregation in this process. Given that most elders have either been in the church for some time or have previously served as elders or have served as elders elsewhere, it is a mark of success that all can say they have learned more. Familiarity is an important factor in leading people.

Another positive result was when asked about if participants had grown in their understanding of our church's polity, there were no neutral responses and there were two "strongly agree" responses. Again, this indicates that the Prayerful Preparation Project was successful in addressing teaching our elders about Presbyterian Polity. This is an

important point when one remembers that our leaders come from a variety of denominational backgrounds. Presbyterians have a way of doing things “decently and in order” and one must understand that order to lead. If we have moved people towards a better understanding of polity, then our processes should reflect that growth.

The strongest response to the survey came on the question as to whether the participants had grown in their prayer lives through this project. While there was one “neutral” response, four “agreed” and four more “strongly agreed.” Our thesis is that an emphasis on Bible study and prayer will change the way we do elder education and will change our elders into better spiritual leaders. If perception of growth in prayer is an indication, then this project has done well with its intent. When we couple a growth in prayer life with at least a moderate response to wanting to learn and grow more, this is worthy of note.

There is one response, however, that needs to be highlighted. When asked whether this course left elders feeling “adequately prepared for leadership in the church” the response was basically flat. While there were some who marked “agree,” those positives were offset by negative responses including one who indicated “strongly disagree.” One would expect at least a minimally positive result given the expressed intent of the course. This raises questions that will be addressed in the final chapter, but it is a surprising result.

### Conclusion

Through this project it can be observed that there are some similarities between the spiritual perspectives and practices of teaching elders and ruling elders. There is a

similar focus on Bible study, prayer and devotion. There is a similar absence of some practices such as fasting, spiritual direction, and fixed-hour prayer. Most clergy and elders do their Bible reading and prayers in the mornings, which is a common pattern. The elders at Mars Hill Presbyterian Church reflect the same kinds of patterns of prayer and Bible study as others within the presbytery.

There is no surprise that elders indicated growth in some areas of knowledge and practice while going through the Prayerful Preparation Project. That there was such a positive response to growing in prayer is a marker of success.

But the fact that elders were less inclined to indicate they feel prepared for leadership is a surprise. In one of the most critical aspects of the course, there is something missing, something lacking. There are new questions that arise from that result, and those questions will be part of our concluding chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

The thesis of this project is that by employing a different model of elder education, one that focused more on Bible Study, prayer, and reflection, one would better equip elders for the task of spiritual leadership. Furthermore, if this model was used more extensively and with a greater time commitment, then there would be a higher degree of elder preparedness for the task of leadership. The results from this study do not necessarily bear that out. While there was an indication of growth in spiritual matters such as understanding the Bible, prayer and knowledge of the polity of the church, when asked about their own sense of whether this project prepared them for their office, the responses of those who participated in the Prayerful Preparation Project at Mars Hill Presbyterian Church did not reveal a positive perspective.

As with many projects and programs within a church this one was neither an unqualified success nor an unmitigated failure. There are positive outcomes that need to be noted and commended. There are critiques and areas for improvement in what was attempted. There are also more questions that might prove interesting avenues for further exploration.

#### Positive Outcomes

What contributed in positive ways in this project? Both the author and those involved will offer some insights.

From a pastor's perspective there are several elements that seemed positive. The timing works to have a small group of committed students that are conscientious about



learning. The mandated moment that is dictated by the Book of Order is truly one in which significant education can take place. Rather than a routine, this one-time educational experience seems to lend itself to something deeper than the typical Sunday School discussions that take place week after week, often with the same small group of people. The expectation that there will be some form of examination makes the participants strive for more.

The balance of materials in light of what elders are looking for also seemed positive. There were introductions to the constitutional documents such that elders would gain more familiarity with them, but there was greater emphasis on the Bible and prayer which was in line with what elders, both in the Presbytery of East Tennessee and in Mars Hill Presbyterian Church, were seeking.<sup>1</sup> Participants were not demanding more time to be doing assignments from the Book of Order; no one was hoping for any “fill-in-the-blank worksheets” to be added. Most of those who participated in the Prayerful Preparation Project responded thought the demands of the course were about right in keeping with their expectations.

The gatherings afforded a real opportunity for participants to build relationships that will help with their leadership. In the conversations around the table each one got a glimpse of others with whom they will be working in the days and years ahead. There were moments of humor. There were stories of faith. There were moments of sharing personal concerns and perspectives. For a group that has to deal with a third of its members rotating off every year anything that can build community is a positive contribution to working relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> See APPENDIX FOUR: ELDER SURVEY RESULTS. Page 160.

There were positive responses from the participants as well. One highlighted the benefit of doing this as a group. Another mentioned how starting the day with prayer was a positive experience. Another had not been familiar with fixed-hour prayer, but thought that the entire experience had increased his prayer life. Yet another mentioned how much going through the Psalms in the Daily Offices had been helpful. The overall impression is that this was a positive experience of spiritual growth. The prayerful portion of the title seems to have been accomplished.

The results indicate that spiritual formation took place during the course of the project. There were positive trends in terms of Bible study, prayer, and knowledge of church polity.

### Critiques and Possible Improvements

The author shares a point that one of the clergy who participated said when asked about improving elder education in his congregation—his answer was “I would hire a better pastor to train them.” In a sense that is true, all of us could be better teachers, but we are the ones to whom the task falls so we must do the best we can. The author readily professes ample room for improvement in pedagogy, but there are other critiques that need to be stated as well.

It must be noted that this was a limited sampling in one setting. We minister in the particular congregation with its peculiarities and personalities, including that of the pastor. Even though there are similarities between our congregation’s demographics and others, the distinct makeup of this group of participants might not be the same elsewhere. As has been noted earlier, this congregation is typical in many ways of other PCUSA

congregations, but that is far from insuring a similar result. The strictures of the setting must be considered when examining the results.

Another element that has to be noted is the time involved, or the lack thereof. Several clergy expressed a desire for more time to accomplish the task. Even though an attempt was made to make the Prayerful Preparation Project more extensive, it was difficult to find a time setting that worked well for all involved. There were several gatherings where at least one participant had to be absent for other issues. Those absences affect continuity and community building, and also mean that someone is not getting the benefit of discussion and questions as they arise in the gathering.

This project was done towards the end of the year which meant that conflicts with vacations and holidays were inevitable. The process of nominations and election within our congregation tends to leave us little time for preparing elders; other clergy mentioned this tension as well. Perhaps it would be better if it were done at another time during the course of the year. There might be times when participant's availability is greater. But given the schedules that parents are facing with active children, and even the multitude of activities that seniors are doing, it may be difficult to find one time frame that is better than another. The pace of our culture works against consistent, committed participation in any project that requires an extended time commitment.

Another critique could be that there is no measurement here of the actual time that participants spent in study or prayer. If one were to do the Bible study and all four of the daily offices, it would take approximately one hour. When combined with the gatherings that would mean seven to ten hours per week. When done consistently over the course of five weeks that would mean approximately thirty to forty hours on task. Obviously, over

the course of several weeks that would be much more time than is required or expected from other models currently in use. But there was no attempt to make participants check off their time or report numbers. The author believes that adults have to be trusted to do what is expected, especially in matters of faith and practice. This is one piece of information that could be helpful to know.

The written materials could also be improved. While there were written introductions for the Offices of Prayer and *lectio divina*, there were no written introductions to the Book of Confessions or the Book of Order. The author has taught those two books for many years to many elders and did not take the time to create specific written introductions. Those gatherings usually employed the actual books which are provided to each participant with guidance as to the contents, the indices, and the ways in which they might typically be used in the work and worship of the church. The preference here is that hands-on use of the books in the gathering may be the better approach rather than a separate sheet of information; however, a separate sheet for later reference might be helpful. The results from the post-project survey indicate that knowledge of both church polity in general and of Mars Hill Presbyterian in particular increased, but the effect might have been greater with more visual material.

The participants also seemed somewhat overwhelmed with the volume of material. Given that most of the elders at Mars Hill were not previously using any form of guide to prayer, suddenly receiving pages of prayers and readings all at once was a bit of a shock. It may have helped that the materials were distributed on a weekly basis, but there is still a great deal to cover and it can be intimidating.

The biggest critique of the project and the most needed improvement is a way to address the matter that elders did not feel as prepared as they would like. It appears that Prayerful Preparation succeeded in the prayerful element but not in the preparation aspect. This raises a number of questions that should be explored. Given that both Bible Study and prayer were expectations from elders does this project fall short on the other aspect that was most anticipated by those preparing for service: duties of elders? And if so, then in what way did this miss the mark? Did those elders mean to indicate the specific tasks that are required in their service? Were they more worried about the details of their duties rather than the spiritual duty to study and pray? Were they wanting more attention to detail than the Prayerful Preparation project provided? More research would be needed to discover the answer to those questions.

This author posits that perhaps the result could be connected with the perception of an elder's duties as being those activities that are required for "running the church" to use Peterson's phrase.<sup>2</sup> It may well be the case that this project is too short in duration or needs correction in content to address the perceptions that have been in place regarding how a church functions. In a traditional setting, where a certain ethos has been present for quite some time, changing how people perceive the role of ruling elder may require more time and effort than was accomplished here.

This author also observes that the combining of so many tasks on a small group of people tends to make elders focus on what they can do that gets results. Study and prayer and reflection are not the most obvious pursuits in that regard. When there are buildings to fix and books to keep and checks to write and budgets to adjust, prayer may well seem

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 57.

the last practical thing on people's minds. There is a utilitarian and pragmatic mindset within our culture, and perhaps within our churches, that expects and works towards "results." Given a small group of people who are charged with overseeing the entire operation of the church, perhaps their expectations are such that prayer and study are activities that do not "add value" as much as other activities.

Another possible interpretation of this finding is that there may still be a divide in participants' minds between spiritual practices which are seen as personal and private, as opposed to the more public operations of the church which maybe viewed as a community organization. In the same way that the civic mission mindset makes members of Mars Hill Presbyterian church less likely to interact more forcefully in the public sphere, might it be the case that there is some hesitancy even within the church to interject what one is experiencing spiritually within the group.

### Further Exploration

Another missing element within the project was that the participants were not asked about structured Bible Study prior to participating. There was a question about structured prayer or using a guide for prayer, but the same question was neglected for Bible Study. From the outset there was the intent that Bible Study would be a critical component of this project. In the initial survey results we see that those who used a structured guide for prayer tended to pray more often, some even several times a day. Would those same results hold true for reading the Bible? Would those who already had a habit of structured study find it easier to do the Bible Studies? Would those who did not already have a developed practice of Bible Study have developed that discipline as a

result of this project? One might further explore the connection between daily prayer and daily Bible study; the author would suggest that there is a strong correlation, but it is an element that was not explicitly addressed here.

An obvious question is whether this project would work in a variety of settings. Would it work in larger congregations?<sup>3</sup> That may well depend on how those churches are structured and the size of their Sessions. In larger churches with larger Sessions, the church operates in a much more structured way. Meetings often have long agendas with multiple reports and presentations; procedures and policies are more in force; Roberts Rules of Order are at the moderator's right hand. To educate elders to participate in that mode of operation would require more attention to operational issues. That is not to say that they would not function from a spiritual base, but those coming to serve would need to know more about how things get done.

Would Prayerful Preparation work in smaller churches? Smaller churches tend to operate more on a family model with decision-making and administration being done through more informal means. Often those serving in leadership are already well-acquainted with one another and may well be related; there is less need for community building or establishing organizational processes. But smaller churches also need a shared spiritual base from which to work. Perhaps the emphases on elements that deal more with organizational matters would be reduced in such a setting.

Could Prayer Preparation be adapted for use in other denominations? While Presbyterians may be unique in our views of the equality between teaching elders and

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<sup>3</sup> Roy Oswald, "How to Minister Effectively in Family, Pastoral, Program and Corporate Sized Churches." Action Information, Volume XVII, Number 2, March/April 1991, pages 1-7. This is an excellent study of the differences between different sized congregations. Mars Hill Presbyterian Church would be classified as a "pastoral church," while congregations both larger and smaller would have distinctive characteristics as well.

ruling elders, other protestant and evangelical communions also have ways in which lay leadership is trained and used. The specific content that has to do with the PCUSA constitution would necessarily have to be altered, but a model in which daily Bible Study, prayer, and gatherings were used could be employed. It would be fascinating to explore the spiritual disciplines of lay leaders in other communions and compare them with those of PCUSA leaders.

There are at least two avenues of exploration that could study the effects of this short term study over a more prolonged time frame. First, how do the disciplines and patterns established here at the beginning of their time of service carry through? During the course of three years of meetings and ministry and meeting the needs of the congregation, do the ruling elders still take time for Bible Study and Prayer and reflection? Or are the effects of this short-term project also short-lived? Without a need to study and prepare for an examination, will the participants continue in prayerful paths? That study would focus on individuals and require more time than what was done here.

The second path along this route would be to explore the practices of the Session as a governing body once those who are leading have all been through such a process. Does this mode of preparation affect the operation of the Session, and if so, how? Another way to approach this question may be to explore how the Session or governing boards conducts its business; in what ways are there corporate spiritual practices that reinforce what was established at the beginning? Are there intentional ways in which a governing board can emphasize spirituality over against “business as usual”?



## Conclusion

The thesis of this project is that through a different mode of preparation ruling elders would grow spiritually and be better prepared for leadership. Prayerful Preparation: Elder Education as Spiritual Formation would use the spiritual disciplines of daily Bible Study, prayer, and reflection, in addition to weekly gatherings, as the mode by which to teach participants what it means to be a leader within the congregation. The intent is that those participating would encounter God in a daily, disciplined dialogue of devotion. The Prayerful Preparation Project would accomplish both spiritual transformation as well as elder education. The end result would hopefully be ruling elders ready to lead from this spiritual base and more sensitive to God's leading.

Participants did reveal that they had grown in terms of Bible study, prayer, and knowledge of the church. In terms of spiritual formation there was positive growth and at least a moderate indication that this might continue on. The spiritual formation aspect was successful. Some may have struggled with the studies and prayers, some may have delighted in such an approach, but the end result was that this aspect was positively received by most of those participating.

However, the elder education aspect did not reveal the same positive results. Participants did not feel themselves adequately prepared for their roles as leaders within the church. Although there was no definition given as to what 'adequately prepared' meant to the participants, from their own perspective this was not achieved. In their own minds they were not fully prepared for the tasks before them. In matters of either competence or confidence the Prayerful Preparation Project fell short. It may be that this

project was too ambitious in two directions, or that it did successfully integrate the tasks of spirituality and leadership in such a way that participants sensed receiving both.

## APPENDIX ONE

### CLERGY SURVEY

1. How many years have you served in your current position?  
☐ 1-3      ☐ 4-6      ☐ 6-10      ☐ 10-14      ☐ 15 or more
2. How many years have you been ordained?  
☐ 1-3      ☐ 4-6      ☐ 6-10      ☐ 10-14      ☐ 15 or more
3. Which best describes your congregational setting?  
☐ rural      ☐ small town      ☐ large town      ☐ urban      ☐ suburban
4. How many elders comprise your session?  
☐ 3-6      ☐ 9      ☐ 12      ☐ 15-18      ☐ 18 or more
5. Which best describes your average Sunday attendance in any and all services?  
☐ < 50      ☐ 50-75      ☐ 75-100      ☐ 100-200      ☐ 200 or more
6. How often do you engage in structured prayer?  
☐ several times/day      ☐ once/daily      ☐ weekly      ☐ less than weekly
7. How often do you have private Bible reading?  
☐ daily/almost daily      ☐ several times/week      ☐ weekly      ☐ less than weekly
8. At what time of day are you most likely to engage in Bible reading?  
☐ morning      ☐ mid-day      ☐ evening      ☐ night
9. Where are you most comfortable praying?  
☐ at home      ☐ at church      ☐ outdoors      ☐ in the car      ☐ in a group
10. At what time of day are you most likely to engage in prayer?  
☐ morning      ☐ mid-day      ☐ evening      ☐ night
11. Do you participate in any small groups for either study or support? ☐ yes ☐ no
12. How often do you meet with these groups?  
☐ daily      ☐ weekly      ☐ monthly      ☐ occasionally
13. Do you have a spiritual mentor or spiritual director? ☐ yes ☐ no
14. How often do you meet with your mentor or director?  
☐ daily      ☐ weekly      ☐ monthly      ☐ quarterly      ☐ occasionally

15. How many sessions/meetings do you typically use in the course of elder education?  
☐ 1-2      ☐ 3-4      ☐ 5-6      ☐ 6-8      ☐ 8 or more
16. How long do each of these sessions usually last?  
☐ 1 hour      ☐ 2 hours      ☐ 3 hours      ☐ 4 hours      ☐ half-day
17. Who is responsible for teaching/leading these sessions?  
☐ solo pastor      ☐ assistant pastor      ☐ pastoral team      ☐ outside leadership
18. Are you ☐ female or ☐ male?
19. Do you use a structured guide for personal prayer and reflection? ☐ yes ☐ no  
If so, please list \_\_\_\_\_
20. Which best describes your level of satisfaction with your current elder education process?  
☐ excellent    ☐ good      ☐ average    ☐ fair      ☐ poor
21. Which best describes your sense of incoming elder's preparedness for their office?  
☐ excellent    ☐ good      ☐ average    ☐ fair      ☐ poor
22. What of following resources do you use for elder education? (please check all that apply)  
☐ Bible  
☐ Book of Confessions  
☐ Book of Order  
☐ Denominational Resources (if so, please list)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
☐ In-house resources (if so, please list)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Companion to the Constitution  
☐ other (please list or describe)  
\_\_\_\_\_
23. Do you do any form of "continuing education" with your session? ☐ yes ☐ no  
☐ each meeting      ☐ quarterly      ☐ semi-annually      ☐ annually
24. How much time do you allot for this continuing education?  
☐ 15 minutes      ☐ 30 minutes      ☐ 60 minutes      ☐ more than 60 minutes

25. Do you examine incoming elders? ☐ yes ☐ no

26. If so, please briefly describe your examination process.

27. Do elders lead any portion of your typical Session Meeting such as a devotion or time of prayer?

☐ occasionally ☐ regularly ☐ always

28. Do your elders use any form of prepared devotions during meeting? ☐ yes ☐ no

29. Do your elders assist in leading worship, and if so, in what capacities? (check all that apply)

☐ reading scripture

☐ leading liturgy

☐ offering prayers

☐ offering "Minutes for Mission"

☐ ushering or greeting

30. Are there written lists of duties for elders/ushers in your congregation? ☐ yes ☐ no

31. What aspect of elder education do you find most difficult?

32. Give an approximate percentage to how much time is devoted to each element in your elder education process. (e.g. 15%, 30%, etc.)

☐ Bible Study

☐ Book of Confessions

☐ Book of Order

☐ Congregational Manual/Handbook

☐ Prayer

☐ Duties of Elders

☐ Presbyterian Polity

33. Which of the following spiritual practices do you employ on a regular basis? (please check all that apply and how often)

<input type="checkbox"/> prayer _____	<input type="checkbox"/> service _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Bible reading _____	<input type="checkbox"/> small groups _____
<input type="checkbox"/> devotional reading _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Centering prayer _____
<input type="checkbox"/> meditation _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Fixed hour prayer _____
<input type="checkbox"/> journaling _____	<input type="checkbox"/> fasting _____
<input type="checkbox"/> retreats _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Sabbath _____
<input type="checkbox"/> silence _____	<input type="checkbox"/> exercise _____
<input type="checkbox"/> solitude _____	<input type="checkbox"/> yoga _____
<input type="checkbox"/> spiritual direction _____	<input type="checkbox"/> other _____
<input type="checkbox"/> accountability partners _____	_____

34. What is working most effectively in your present process of elder education?

35. What is the one thing that you would change about your present process of elder education to make it better?

\_\_\_\_\_ (name) \_\_\_\_\_ (church)

Your responses are confidential and for research purposes only. No specific information or responses will be published without your consent. You may be contacted for further clarification or discussion. Thank you for participating in this project.

## APPENDIX TWO

### CLERGY SURVEY RESULTS

	1 to 3	4 to 6	6 - 10	10 - 14	15> <sup>1</sup>
1. years in current position	3	5	1		1
2. years ordained	1	1	2	1	5
	rural	sm town	lg town	urban	suburban
3. congregational setting	1	3	1	1	4
	3 - 6	nine	twelve	15 - 18	18>
4. size of session	1	2	2	3	2
	< 50	50-75	75-100	100-200	200>
5. average attendance	1	1	3	1	4
	several	once	weekly	<weekly	
6. structured prayer	2	2	4		
	daily	sev/wk	weekly	<weekly	
7. private Bible reading	5	5			
	morning	mid-day	eve	night	
8. time for Bible reading	9			2	
	home	church	outdoor	car	group anywhere
9. most comfortable spots	3	5	2	2	1 1
	morning	mid-day	eve	night	
10. time for prayer	5	2	2	3	
	yes	no			
11. small group part	4	6			
	daily	weekly	monthly	occasionally	
12. small group freq		1	3		
	yes	no			
13. mentor/director	1	9			
	daily	weekly	monthly	quarterly	occasionally
14. freq with mentor/director		1			
	1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 6	6 - 8	8>
15. freq educ. sessions	5	3			
	1 hr	2 hr	3 hr	4 hr	half day
16. length of sessions	2	4	2		1
	solo	assoc	team	outside	
17. who responsible	8		1		
	female	male			
18. male or female	3	7			
	yes	no	yes/no		
19. guide for prayer/reflection	2	6	1		
	excellent	good	avg	fair	poor
20. current satisfaction w/EE	1	5	4		
	excellent	good	avg	fair	poor

<sup>1</sup> The Clergy Survey was created and conducted by the author in August of 2009. Twenty Clergy or Teaching Elders in the Presbytery of East Tennessee were invited to participate; ten completed the surveys which are included here.

23. continuing ed w/Session	yes 6	no 4							
frequency	each 1	qtrly	semi-ann 1	annual 4					
24. cont ed. time	15 min	30 min 1	60 min	>60 min 5					
25. examine incoming elders	3	yes 2	no						
26. exam process. Evaluation by 2 or 3 elders, questions provided, 3. Newcomers tell or write about their faith journey, 5. Quiz on polity then tell personal faith, 1.									
27. elders leadership in meetings	occas. 2	regular 2	always 6						
28. prepared devotions	4	yes 6	no						
29. elders in worship: scripture 7, liturgy 8, prayers 4, M for M 8, usher 10									
30. written lists of duties	yes 9	no 1							
comments: yes for ushers, not elders									
31. difficulty: time 2; doctrine 1; actual exam 1; make it current 1; broad topic 2; explaining the need for both spiritual and administrative leadership 1.									
32. percent each element:									
Bible Study	5	10	10	15	10	15	10		10
Book of Confessions	15	2		10	5	5	20		5
Book of Order	25	2	10	15	10	10	20	20	5
Congregational Manual	30		70	10		20			50
Prayer	5	5		15	17	20	10		
Duties of Elders	10	15	10	20	35	20	20	20	30
Presbyterian Polity	10	10		15	25	10	20	10	
Theology								20	
Other sources								30	



33. spiritual practices

prayer _daily 10	service _weekly 5
Bible reading _daily 7, weekly 4	small groups _weekly 1, monthly 1
devotional reading _weekly 6	Centering prayer _Session meeting
meditation _daily 2	Fixed hour prayer _
journaling __weekly 1	fasting _
retreats _annually 5	Sabbath _all day 1, weekly 3
silence _daily 2, weekly 2, annually 1	exercise _daily 4, weekly 4
solitude __daily 1, annually 2	yoga _
spiritual direction _	other __
accountability partners _weekly 1, mo 1, annual 1	

34. What works most effectively for EE:

- Current elders share what to expect with new ones
- Mentoring
- Relating their gifts to leadership role
- Discussing spiritual leadership
- Sharing faith journeys
- Study basics of Reformed tradition and polity
- Give them tools for serving

35. What you would change about EE to make it better:

- More interactive
- More time
- See what works best
- Hire a training pastor
- Use Joan Gray's handbook
- Use personality testing
- Use group training at presbytery level
- Deeper study
- More frequent study
- Longer and more frequent study sessions

## APPENDIX THREE

### ELDER SURVEY

1. How many years have you been involved in your current church?

☐ 1-3      ☐ 4-6      ☐ 6-10      ☐ 10-14      ☐ 15 or more

2. Have you been previously ordained as an elder? ☐ yes ☐ no

3. If previously ordained, how long ago did you actively serve on Session?

☐ 1-3      ☐ 4-6      ☐ 6-10      ☐ 10-14      ☐ 15 or more

4. Which best describes your congregational setting?

☐ rural      ☐ small town      ☐ large town      ☐ urban      ☐ suburban

5. How many elders comprise your session?

☐ 3-6      ☐ 9      ☐ 12      ☐ 15-18      ☐ 18 or more

6. Which best describes your average Sunday attendance in any and all services?

☐ < 50      ☐ 50-75      ☐ 75-100      ☐ 100-200      ☐ 200 or more

7. Which best describes your worship attendance?

☐ every week      ☐ nearly every week      ☐ 2-3 times/month      ☐ once/month or less

8. How often do you engage in structured prayer?

☐ several times/day      ☐ once/daily      ☐ weekly      ☐ less than weekly

9. How often do you have private Bible reading?

☐ daily/almost daily      ☐ several times/week      ☐ weekly      ☐ less than weekly

10. At what time of day are you most likely to engage in Bible reading?

☐ morning      ☐ mid-day      ☐ evening      ☐ night

11. Where are you most comfortable praying? (check all that apply)

☐ at home      ☐ at church      ☐ outdoors      ☐ in the car      ☐ in a group

12. At what time of day are you most likely to engage in prayer?

☐ morning      ☐ mid-day      ☐ evening      ☐ night

13. Do you participate in any small groups for either study or support? ☐ yes ☐ no

14. How often do you meet with these groups?

☐ daily      ☐ weekly      ☐ monthly      ☐ occasionally

15. Do you have a spiritual mentor or spiritual director? ☐ yes ☐ no

16. How often do you meet with your mentor or director?

☐ daily      ☐ weekly      ☐ monthly      ☐ quarterly      ☐ occasionally

17. Are you ☐ female or ☐ male?

18. Do you use a structured guide for personal prayer and reflection? ☐ yes ☐ no

If so, please list \_\_\_\_\_

19. Which best describes your level of satisfaction with your current prayer life?

☐ excellent    ☐ good      ☐ average    ☐ fair      ☐ poor

20. At this moment how prepared do you feel to take on active service on the Session?

☐ excellent    ☐ good      ☐ average    ☐ fair      ☐ poor

21. Do elders lead any portion of your typical Session Meeting such as a devotion or time of prayer?

☐ occasionally      ☐ regularly      ☐ always      ☐ don't know

22. Do elders use any form of prepared devotions during meetings? ☐ yes ☐ no

23. Do elders assist in leading worship, and if so, in what capacities? (check all that apply)

☐ reading scripture

☐ leading liturgy

☐ offering prayers

☐ offering "Minutes for Mission"

☐ ushering or greeting

☐ other

24. Do you know of written guidelines of duties for elders in your congregation? ☐ yes

☐ no

25. What aspect of elder education are you most looking forward to?

26. Of the following areas, which would you want to spend the most time on during your process of elder education?

- ☐ Bible Study
- ☐ Book of Confessions
- ☐ Book of Order
- ☐ Congregational Manual/Handbook
- ☐ Prayer
- ☐ Duties of Elders
- ☐ Presbyterian Polity
- ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_

27. How comfortable are you praying in public?

- ☐ very      ☐ mostly      ☐ somewhat      ☐ not really      ☐ not at all

28. How comfortable are you visiting with others from the congregation?

- ☐ very      ☐ mostly      ☐ somewhat      ☐ not really      ☐ not at all

29. In what other church connected events do you participate on a regular basis? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Sunday School
- ☐ Women's Circle or fellowship Group
- ☐ Men's fellowship group
- ☐ choir
- ☐ service ministries
- ☐ church committees
- ☐ outreach or evangelism groups
- ☐ other (please list) \_\_\_\_\_

30. Were you raised in the Presbyterian Church? ☐ yes ☐ no

31. If raised in another denomination, please check the one that applies.

- ☐ Methodist    ☐ Episcopal    ☐ Baptist    ☐ Catholic    ☐ Lutheran    ☐ other

32. Which of the following spiritual practices do you employ on a regular basis? (please check all that apply and how often)

\_\_\_ prayer \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ Bible reading \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ devotional reading \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ meditation \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ journaling \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ retreats \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ silence \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ solitude \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ spiritual direction \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ accountability partners \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ service \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ small groups \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ Centering prayer \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ Fixed hour prayer \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ fasting \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ Sabbath \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ exercise \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ yoga \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (name) \_\_\_\_\_ (church)

Your responses are confidential and for research purposes only. No specific information or responses will be published without your consent. You may be contacted for further clarification or discussion. Thank you for participating in this project.

## APPENDIX FOUR

### ELDER SURVEY RESULTS

1. How many years have you been involved in your current church? <sup>1</sup>  
11 1-3    8 4-6    8 6-10    7 10-14    35 15 or more
2. Have you been previously ordained as an elder? 37 yes 31 no
3. If previously ordained, how long ago did you actively serve on Session?  
9 1-3    8 4-6    8 6-10    7 10-14    6 15 or more
4. Which best describes your congregational setting?  
6 rural    25 small town    6 large town    9 urban    22 suburban
5. How many elders comprise your session?  
6 3-6    7 9    19 12    16 15-18    21 18 or more
6. Which best describes your average Sunday attendance in any and all services?  
8 < 50    7 50-75    16 75-100    11 100-200    27 200 or more
7. Which best describes your worship attendance?  
39 every week    32 nearly every week    3 2-3 times/month    0 once/month or less
8. How often do you engage in structured prayer?  
21 several times/day    30 once/daily    15 weekly    3 less than weekly
9. How often do you have private Bible reading?  
22 daily/almost daily    10 several times/week    17 weekly    19 less than weekly
10. At what time of day are you most likely to engage in Bible reading?  
32 morning    3 mid-day    19 evening    18 night
11. Where are you most comfortable praying? (check all that apply)  
61 at home    41 at church    36 outdoors    36 in the car    19 in a group
12. At what time of day are you most likely to engage in prayer?  
46 morning    15 mid-day    25 evening    31 night
13. Do you participate in any small groups for either study or support? 38 yes 32 no
14. How often do you meet with these groups?  
   daily    25 weekly    11 monthly    6 occasionally

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<sup>1</sup> The Elder Survey was created and conducted by the author in August, 2009. It was forwarded with the Clergy Surveys to twenty churches in the Presbytery of East Tennessee. The written surveys were to be completed by elders within the context of a Session Meeting and returned.

16. How often do you meet with your mentor or director?  
 \_\_\_ daily      3 weekly    2 monthly    \_\_\_ quarterly    3 occasionally
17. Are you 40 female or 28 male?
18. Do you use a structured guide for personal prayer and reflection? 22 yes 45 no
19. Which best describes your level of satisfaction with your current prayer life?  
1 excellent 27 good    18 average 17 fair 4 poor
20. At this moment how prepared do you feel to take on active service on the Session?  
12 excellent 29 good    21 average 4 fair \_\_\_ poor
21. Do elders lead any portion of typical Session Meeting such as devotion or time of prayer? 16 occasionally 18 regularly 22 always 9 don't know 2 no 1 rarely
22. Do elders use any form of prepared devotions during meetings? 37 yes 22 no
23. Do elders assist in leading worship, and if so, in what capacities? (check all that apply) 36 reading scripture 35 leading liturgy 27 offering prayers 4 other.  
49 offering "Minutes for Mission" 53 ushering or greeting 23 other 3 don't know
24. Do you know of written guidelines of duties for your elders? 2 yes \_\_\_ no
25. What aspect of elder education are you most looking forward to? 40 answers.
26. Of the following areas, which would you want to spend the most time on during your process of elder education? 28 Bible Study 17 Book of Confessions 16 Book of Order 10 Congregational Manual/Handbook 27 Prayer 42 Duties of Elders  
20 Presbyterian Polity 9 other
27. How comfortable are you praying in public? 13 very 15 mostly 30 somewhat  
9 not really 2 not at all
28. How comfortable are you visiting with others from the congregation?  
20 very 28 mostly 18 somewhat 3 not really \_\_\_ not at all
29. In what other church connected events do you participate on a regular basis? (check all that apply) 52 Sunday School 20 Women's Circle or fellowship Group  
8 Men's fellowship group 29 service 6 choir 12 outreach 21 other  
53 church committees 17 other
30. Were you raised in the Presbyterian Church? 29 yes 36 no
31. If raised in another denomination, please check the one that applies.  
15 Methodist 2 Episcopal 12 Baptist 5 Catholic 1 Lutheran 4 other

32. Which of the following spiritual practices do you employ on a regular basis?

	no freq shown	daily or more	weekly or more	monthly or more	annually or more	other
prayer	26	28	3			
Bible reading	19	20	10			
devotional reading	19	16	3	1		
meditation	15	11				
journaling		1		1		
retreats	7					11
silence	10	2	1			
solitude	9	1	2	1	1	
spiritual direction	1	1				
accountability partners	1	2	1			
service	29	1	7	6		
small groups	13		5	4		
centering prayer	1					
fixed hour prayer						
fasting						
Sabbath	19		10			
exercise	19	3	9			
yoga	2	1	1	1		
other	3 (Christian book study, Christian music daily, Lenten observance)					



## APPENDIX FIVE

### PRAYERFUL PREPARATION SURVEY

Please answer the following questions regarding our elder education course, Prayerful Preparation. There are several questions which are answered on a sliding scale. There are also several questions that give you the opportunity to answer in your own words.

Please **circle or bold** the most appropriate response to the following.

Spiritual leadership is different than other forms of leadership.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

The church is a unique organization with unique needs

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

Character is vital for effective leadership.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

I was hesitant to accept the call to leadership.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

I have grown in my knowledge of the Bible through this process.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

I have grown in my understanding of Church polity through this course.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

I have grown in my prayer life through this course.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

I felt adequately prepared for leadership in the church through this course.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

The course inspired me to want to learn more.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

I learned new ways of prayer through the course.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

I am more sensitive to God's leading.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

I have learned more about our church through the course.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

I think the demands of the course were well-suited to the task.

strongly disagree - disagree - neutral - agree - strongly agree

I usually did the Bible Studies in the  
Morning – midday – evening – night

I usually did the prayers offices in the  
Morning – midday – evening – night

The following questions allow you an opportunity to offer your impressions of our elder education. Please give them prayerful consideration.

What elements of Prayerful Preparation were most useful for you?

What elements of Prayerful Preparation are you likely to continue to practice and why?

What elements of Prayerful Preparation were most difficult for you?

What elements were least useful for you?

What changes would you suggest to improve Prayerful Preparation?

## APPENDIX SIX

### PRAYERFUL PREPARATION SURVEY RESULTS

Question	Answers					Score <sup>1</sup>
	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree	
Spiritual leadership is different than other forms of leadership.	0	2	2	3	2	5
The church is a unique organization with unique needs.	0	1	1	7	0	6
Character is vital for effective leadership.	0	1	0	5	3	10
I was hesitant to accept the call to leadership.	0	3	2	4	0	1
I have grown in my knowledge of the Bible through this process.	0	0	3	5	1	7
I have grown in my understanding of Church polity through this course.	0	0	0	7	2	11
I have grown in my prayer life through this course.	0	0	1	4	4	12
I felt adequately prepared for leadership in the church through this course.	1	2	2	4	0	0
The course inspired me to want to learn more.	0	0	3	6	0	6
I learned new ways of prayer through the course.	0	0	3	6	0	6
I am more sensitive to God's leading.	0	0	3	6	0	6
I have learned more about our church through the course.	0	0	0	9	0	9
I think the demands of the course were well-suited to the task.	1	0	4	3	1	3

---

<sup>1</sup> The Prayerful Preparation Survey was created and conducted by the author in January, 2012. It was given in written form for elders in Mars Hill Presbyterian Church to complete within a two week time frame. Nine out of fourteen participants chose to complete the survey; their responses are included here.

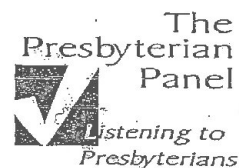


# APPENDIX SEVEN

## 2005 SNAPSHOT



### A Presbyterian Panel Snapshot Characteristics of Presbyterians 2005

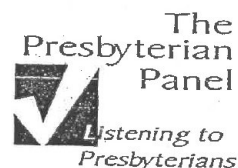


	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
<b>Demographics:</b>				
Median age	58	58	52	55
Female	62%	51%	24%	41%
Currently married (of those 25+ years old)	80%	81%	86%	81%
Percent ever divorced (of those ever-married)	21%	24%	20%	30%
Average household size	2.4 persons	2.4 persons	2.8 persons	2.6 persons
Living alone	17%	15%	10%	13%
<b>Political preference:</b>				
Democrat	27%	30%	49%	64%
Independent	17%	17%	22%	17%
Republican	53%	51%	26%	17%
Other	3%	2%	2%	2%
Total <sup>1</sup>	100%	100%	99%	100%
<b>Formal education (aged 25 years or more):</b>				
High school or less	12%	12%	—	—
Some college	24%	23%	—	—
College graduate	36%	34%	—	—
Graduate degree	29%	31%	100%	100%
Total <sup>1</sup>	101%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Annual family income:</b>				
< \$30,000	14%	11%	3%	7%
\$30,000 - \$59,999	23%	28%	31%	29%
\$60,000 - \$89,999	24%	24%	34%	23%
\$90,000 - \$124,999	18%	19%	22%	23%
\$125,000 or more	21%	18%	10%	18%
Total <sup>1</sup>	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Theological orientation:</b>				
Very conservative/conservative	41%	43%	34%	21%
Moderate	40%	39%	38%	34%
Very liberal/liberal	19%	19%	28%	45%
Total <sup>1</sup>	100%	101%	100%	100%
<b>Denomination raised in:</b>				
Presbyterian	44%	47%	61%	69%
Methodist	16%	13%	8%	7%
Baptist	10%	12%	7%	6%
Catholic	6%	7%	3%	3%
Other	24%	21%	21%	15%
Total <sup>1</sup>	100%	100%	100%	100%

Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202 888-728-7228 ext. 2040  
[www.pcusa.org/research/panel](http://www.pcusa.org/research/panel)



**A Presbyterian Panel Snapshot  
Characteristics of Presbyterians  
2005**

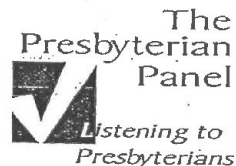


<b>Worship attendance:</b>				
Every week	25%	36%	NA	NA
Nearly every week	40%	50%	NA	NA
2-3 times a month	15%	11%	NA	NA
Once a month or less	20%	3%	NA	NA
Total <sup>1</sup>	100%	100%	NA	NA
<b>Other religious participation:</b>				
Attended a non-worship event at church in the previous month	73%	95%	NA	NA
Volunteered at church in the previous month	62%	95%	NA	NA
<b>Frequency of private prayer:</b>				
Daily/almost daily	67%	70%	87%	83%
Several times a week	14%	16%	10%	11%
Weekly	5%	4%	2%	2%
Less than weekly	14%	10%	1%	4%
Total <sup>1</sup>	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Frequency of private Bible reading:</b>				
Daily/almost daily	16%	20%	54%	33%
Several times a week	16%	16%	36%	33%
Weekly	11%	14%	8%	14%
Less than weekly	57%	50%	3%	20%
Total <sup>1</sup>	100%	100%	101%	100%
<b>View of the Bible:</b>				
Literal word of God	18%	17%	5%	2%
Word of God, to be interpreted in light of historical and cultural context	38%	43%	56%	53%
Word of God, to be interpreted in light of historical context and church's teachings	33%	32%	32%	36%
Not the word of God	10%	6%	7%	9%
Don't know	2%	1%	—	*
Total <sup>1</sup>	101%	99%	100%	100%
<b>Believe that:</b>				
There is life after death (strongly agree or agree) <sup>2</sup>	86%	92%	97%	92%
Jesus will return to earth one day (strongly agree or agree) <sup>2</sup>	69%	78%	80%	67%
All different religions are equally true (strongly agree or agree) <sup>2</sup>	32%	24%	7%	21%
Only followers of Jesus can be saved (strongly agree or agree) <sup>2</sup>	41%	45%	37%	22%

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**A Presbyterian Panel Snapshot  
Characteristics of Presbyterians  
2005**



<b>Opinions on homosexuality and ordination:</b>				
Would personally like to see the PC(USA) permit ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians as ministers (yes, definitely or yes, probably) <sup>3</sup>	25%	24%	43%	58%
Decisions on ordination of gays and lesbians to ministry should be left to presbyteries to make on a case-by-case basis (strongly agree or agree) <sup>2</sup>	20%	19%	38%	51%
<b>Opinions on other same-sex issues:</b>				
Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry <sup>2</sup>	23%	22%	35%	51%
Presbyterian ministers should be prohibited from performing ceremonies that bless same-sex unions <sup>2</sup>	48%	52%	47%	32%
Same sex couples should be allowed to adopt children <sup>2</sup>	34%	36%	51%	65%
Gay partners who make a legal commitment to each other should be entitled to the same rights and benefits as couples in traditional marriages <sup>2</sup>	36%	36%	58%	70%
A person who has sex with someone of the same sex is committing a sin <sup>2</sup>	48%	54%	48%	32%

Source: Background Survey for the 2006-2008 Presbyterian Panel

<sup>1</sup>May not total to 100% because of rounding

<sup>2</sup>Other response options: neutral or not sure; disagree; strongly disagree

<sup>3</sup>Other response options: not sure; no, probably not; no, definitely not

NA = Not asked

\* = Less than 0.5%

--- = none

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## APPENDIX EIGHT

### STUDIES AND OFFICES

#### **Week One – The Call** **Monday – Moses and the Burning Bush**

Scripture Lesson for Monday: Exodus 3:1-22, ESV

1 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

2 And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

3 And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."

4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

5 Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

6 And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings,

8 and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

9 And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

10 Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

12 He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

13 Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

14 God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'"

15 God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

16 Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt,



17 and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey." "

18 And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.'

19 But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.

20 So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go.

21 And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty,

22 but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Why does Moses hesitate to obey? Do we do the same?

When has God addressed you in an unlikely, unexpected way?

What hesitations do you have now about leading the people of God to something new?

How does God address Moses' reluctance? What assurances are offered?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Monday – Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.  
The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue,  
Fresh as the morning and sure as the sunrise.  
The Lord is all I have, and in the Lord I put my hope. (Lamentations 3:22-24)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 145

Bible Reading: Matt. 21:1-11

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Almighty God, You shine forth in glory in unexpected places. You bring forth light from the mysteries of Your power and might. You create each day and grant it to us as a gift. We praise and thank You for Your wonders. You called to Moses and told him that he was on holy ground; he thought he was only shepherding sheep. You called to Moses with a great and demanding task; he thought he was only running the family business. You called to Moses and promised to be with him; he thought that he would be going it alone. Help us this day, Lord, that we might see and hear You shining in the midst of the mundane all around us. Speak to us of what You would have us do for Your sake and for Your people. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
The Lord will carry those who are weak, the Lord will strength the faithful.  
God will watch over us all the day through.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 120

### **Prayer:**

Holy God, You called to Moses in the midst of his daily work; while he was doing his job You called with a new task—from tending sheep to shepherding a great nation. Help us this day, Lord, that we might see the larger picture of what we are doing in Your will. Bless our work that it be a blessing to others. I pray in Jesus' name.  
Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 97

Bible Reading: 2 Peter 1:12-21

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Gracious God, I have spoken with many this day. I have directed some and received instruction from others. I have comforted some and some have encouraged me. I have spoken when I should have kept silence; I have been silent when I might well have spoken a fit word in time. Lord God, forgive those words which have not been a blessing, and add Your blessing to those words which have passed my lips to others. In the remains of this day continue to speak to my heart. I pray through Jesus Christ, the Living Word. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Merciful God, I have failed You in thought, word and deed this day. I have not lived a holy and upright life, and even if I have appeared so before others, You know the truth that lies within. I have hesitated to do Your will; I have avoided difficult tasks that caused me fear; I not lived in wonder and fear of You and Your holy ways. Cleanse me and forgive me for my faults this day; spare others any hurt or pain that I may have caused; grant Your grace unto me again this night for I need it so. All this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Short verse: Exodus 3:6 -- And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Ending Prayer: I entrust all that I am and have into Your care, O Lord; grant unto me and all that are in this house this night a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen.

## **Week One – The Call**

### **Tuesday – Samuel**

Scripture for Tuesday: 1 Samuel 3:1-21, ESV

1 Now the young man Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.

2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place.

3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was.

4 Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!"

5 and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down.

6 And the Lord called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again."

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

8 And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the young man.

9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.' " So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

11 Then the Lord said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.

12 On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.

13 And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.

14 Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

15 Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.

16 But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am."

17 And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you."

18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him."

19 And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.

20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord.

21 And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

What do you think it means that Eli's vision had grown dim?

Are there times when the word of the Lord seems infrequent to you?

Are there voices other than God's that are calling us to serve them?

Samuel is faced with a difficult task immediately; how do you think he felt?

Would we be as eager to say "Here I am" if we knew exactly what was coming?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Tuesday – Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.

The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue,

Fresh as the morning and sure as the sunrise.

The Lord is all I have, and in the Lord I put my hope. (Lamentations 3:22-24)

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 146

Bible Reading: Matt. 21:12-22

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Creator God, You have created a new morning, a new day, a fresh start. You have kept us through the night watches and Your Spirit has spoken even there. As we face a new day, Lord, help us that we might be faithful to the words You speak to us; help us that we might proclaim Your word to all those around us; help us that nothing might deter our service to You in all things. May Your vision be our vision this day; may we see things as they truly are; may we speak truth in all we do. Bless and keep us this day and we will give You all the thanks and praise. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The Lord will carry those who are weak, the Lord will strength the faithful.

God will watch over us all the day through.

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 121

### **Prayer:**

Lord God, we thank You for Your care and provision for us. We thank You for granting us meaningful labor to do and the skills and abilities with which to work and contribute. We thank You that our lives make a difference in the lives of others. We pray now for those who are not able to work this day through disability or unemployment or illness; provide for their needs as well. Help me that I may work with a vision of Your kingdom ever before me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 30

Bible Reading: 2 Peter 1:12-21

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord God, as I leave behind the toil of the day and turn my attention to family and friends, I ask that Your blessing continue with us. May we rejoice in the fellowship of love and peace that can only come from You; may we celebrate the many blessings that You have poured into our lives this very day; may we eat and feast of Your bounty always giving You thanks from grateful and humble hearts; may we smile and build up those with whom we will spend these evening hours. Help us that we may look back and see Your presence with us clearly, and that we may look forward and follow You faithfully. Hear our prayer, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Holy Lord, send Your Spirit that it might search my heart and mind and reveal to me what You would have for me this night. Let me be honest with myself; let me be humble before You; let me be free from anxiety and trusting in Your grace alone. Cleanse me of my faults; heal me of my diseases; help me in my duties; save me for the sake of Christ my Savior and my only hope, in whose name I pray. Amen.

Short verse: Samuel 3:10, ESV -- And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

Ending Prayer: I entrust all that I am and have into Your care, O Lord; grant unto me and all that are in this house this night a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen.

## **Week One – The Call**

### **Wednesday – Isaiah**

Scripture for Wednesday: Isaiah 6:1-8

- 1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.
- 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.
- 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"
- 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.
- 5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"
- 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.
- 7 And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."
- 8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

What do you feel when you hear the words, "Holy, Holy, Holy?"

Do we dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips?

Are we, also, unclean and in need of purification?

What does the burning coal represent to you?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.



### **Wednesday – Morning Prayer**

#### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.

The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue,

Fresh as the morning and sure as the sunrise.

The Lord is all I have, and in the Lord I put my hope. (Lamentations 3:22-24)

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 147

Bible Reading: Matthew 21:23-32

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

#### **Morning Prayer:**

Holy and righteous God, You alone are holy! You alone are worthy! You alone are the God of power and majesty and glory! Your presence fills the temples of space and time, and even the temples of our hearts and souls. We pray, Lord, that You would fill us again this day. Cleanse us of every vile and unclean thought and word and deed. Remove from us any desire or intention that does not come from You. Send us this day to do Your will in whatever task we are called to do. May all that we think, and say, and do this day be pleasing in Your sight. May our emotions and actions and statements bring Your glory, both this day and forevermore. You alone are worthy, O God of glory and grace! Amen.

### **Noon Prayer**

#### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The Lord will carry those who are weak, the Lord will strength the faithful.

God will watch over us all the day through.

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 122

#### **Prayer:**

We labor and toil in the daylight hours, O Lord. We see the world and all that is going on around us, and yet, we realize that our vision is not what it could be, our world is not yet what You want, our efforts are not always productive and creative. Help us this day, O Lord, that our work might be wrought in You and in Your will so that it will endure to bless others. We ask in the name of Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 48

Bible Reading: 2 Peter 3:1-10

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord God, as I leave behind the toil of the day and turn my attention to family and friends, I ask that Your blessing continue with us. May we rejoice in the fellowship of love and peace that can only come from You; may we celebrate the many blessings that You have poured into our lives this very day; may we eat and feast of Your bounty always giving You thanks from grateful and humble hearts; may we smile and build up those with whom we will spend these evening hours. Help us that we may look back and see Your presence with us clearly, and that we may look forward and follow You faithfully. Hear our prayer, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!

You have given me relief when I was in distress.

Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Holy Lord, send Your Spirit that it might search my heart and mind and reveal to me what You would have for me this night. Let me be honest with myself; let me be humble before You; let me be free from anxiety and trusting in Your grace alone. Cleanse me of my faults; heal me of my diseases; help me in my duties; save me for the sake of Christ my Savior and my only hope, in whose name I pray. Amen.

Short verse: Samuel 3:10, ESV -- And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

Ending Prayer: I entrust all that I am and have into Your care, O Lord; grant unto me and all that are in this house this night a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen.

## **Week One – The Call**

### **Thursday – Jeremiah**

Scripture for Wednesday: Jeremiah 1:1-19, ESV

- 1 The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin,
- 2 to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.
- 3 It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.
- 4 Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying,
- 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."
- 6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth."
- 7 But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.
- 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord."
- 9 Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.
- 10 See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."
- 11 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see an almond branch."
- 12 Then the Lord said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it."
- 13 The word of the Lord came to me a second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north."
- 14 Then the Lord said to me, "Out of the north disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land.
- 15 For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the Lord, and they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah.
- 16 And I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands.
- 17 But you, dress yourself for work; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them.
- 18 And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land.
- 19 They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you."

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Did Jeremiah have any real choice in his being a prophet of the Lord?

What does Jeremiah being consecrated and appointed before his birth mean to you?

What excuses does Jeremiah offer to resist God's call to him?

God gives Jeremiah both the ability to build up and to destroy; what does that say about spiritual leadership?

Throughout the remainder of the book of Jeremiah we hear of an uneasy relationship between Jeremiah and God; is it acceptable for a spiritual leader to argue with God?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.  
The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue,  
Fresh as the morning and sure as the sunrise.  
The Lord is all I have, and in the Lord I put my hope. (Lamentations 3:22-24)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 36

Bible Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

### **Lord's Prayer**

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

God of the ages, You see everything from eternity, we can see it only from our small space and time. You see us from the beginning and know what it is that you have in store for us; You see the delights that will come our way and You know the difficulties that will try our souls. You have appointed us to be part of Your people; You have consecrated us as servants of the Most High; You have drawn us into the mysteries of Your ways. Help us, Lord, for we are not always sure what to do with that. We sometimes tear down when we should build up; we sometimes uproot what should be planted. We need Your wisdom and guidance this day so that our actions might be in accord with Your will for us and others. Direct us, Lord, now and always. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
The Lord will carry those who are weak, the Lord will strength the faithful.  
God will watch over us all the day through.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 123

### **Prayer:**

I confess, Lord, that there are days when I'm not sure I'm really doing anything great. I have figured out how to do my job reasonably well; I have made life to be fairly comfortable; I do not rock the boat very often. But is that what You truly want? Am I actually doing Your will this day? Speak to me once again, God. I need to hear Your voice. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 27

Bible Reading: 2 Peter 3:11-18

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Merciful Master, You are more gracious to me than I deserve; You are more steadfast than I suspect; You are more watchful than I am aware. You have gone before me this day to prepare the paths that would lead to the place of blessing for me. You have minded details and dynamics and decisions that have affected me in ways that I will never know. You have done all of this so that I would acknowledge Your power and presence in my life and in this world. Make me mindful, Lord, of all Your ways. Make me ready to serve You each and every day. May all that I have done this day be a source of blessing in the lives of my family and friends and neighbors for the sake of Jesus. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

How often I must disappoint You, Lord. How many are the ways in which I fall short of living as You desire. And yet Your mercy and grace guard me always; Your forgiveness is offered before I even realize my sin; Your purposes are being fulfilled in me even when I am unaware. Thank You, Lord.

Short verse: Jeremiah 1:5 -- "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Ending Prayer: I entrust all that I am and have into Your care, O Lord; grant unto me and all that are in this house this night a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen.

## **Week One – The Call**

### **Friday – the First Disciples**

Scripture for Friday: Matthew 4:18-25, ESV

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

19 And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

21 And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.

22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

24 So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.

25 And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

What part of your work life could you walk away from at a moment's notice?

Are there any "nets" that have us caught at the moment? Are they good or bad?

Do you know of any "fish out of water" that are in your immediate circle? Have you shared the gospel with them?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.

The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue,

Fresh as the morning and sure as the sunrise.

The Lord is all I have, and in the Lord I put my hope. (Lamentations 3:22-24)

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 130

Bible Reading: Matthew 22:1-14

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

O Father of all, here it is another work day—another Friday when it seems that people are focused on the weekend and what they will do with their time. Most of them are planning their leisure activities—the lake, the game, the party, the family gathering. How many are thinking about casting their nets? Am I even thinking about the lost right about now? Lord, help me this day that all I do may remind me of You; help me this day that I might offer some glimmer of the grace that You have given me; help me to see those who need Your love and encouragement. May my efforts all have Your blessing this day, for I ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The Lord will carry those who are weak, the Lord will strength the faithful.

God will watch over us all the day through.

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 124

### **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, You showed up in the middle of work; You walked right in on a maintenance session; You took the down time of a few fishermen and launched a church that would change the world forevermore. If you are here in the midst of my daily routine, help me to see You. If you are calling me today to something new, help me to hear You. If you have dreams for me beyond what I can see, help me to grasp them. In Jesus' name. Amen.



## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 139

Bible Reading: Jude 1-16

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord God, it is Friday evening; it is the Sabbath for some, the beginning of the time of rest. It seems to be that this is the start of a busy weekend filled with as many things to do as there were this past week. It seems that life doesn't ever really slow down, Lord. May Your Holy Spirit breathe upon me once again with new breath, new life, new fire for You. Take away the exhaustion that comes so easily and replace it with the inspiration that can only come from You. Let me catch my breath this evening, and in catching it, may I be caught up once again in Your plan and purpose for my life. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

I bow myself before You this night, O Lord, humbling myself as I look back on the week past. I have done so many things, but I have not always done them for Your glory. I have spoken so many words, but I have not always spoken them in love. I have labored earnestly, but I have not always toiled for You. Forgive me, Lord; grasp me again in Your grace. Amen.

Short verse: Matthew 4:19-20, ESV -- And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Ending Prayer: I entrust all that I am and have into Your care, O Lord; grant unto me and all that are in this house this night a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen.

## **Week One – The Call**

### **Saturday – Zacchaeus**

Scripture for Saturday: Luke 19:1-10, ESV

- 1 He entered Jericho and was passing through.
- 2 And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.
- 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature.
- 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.
- 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."
- 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.
- 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."
- 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."
- 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.
- 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Does Zacchaeus being "small in stature" speak only to his physical condition?

What is the one thing about your body that you would change if you could?

What would explain Zacchaeus' sudden change of heart?

Who displays the greater hospitality in this story? Jesus or Zacchaeus?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.  
The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue,  
Fresh as the morning and sure as the sunrise.  
The Lord is all I have, and in the Lord I put my hope. (Lamentations 3:22-24)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 149

Bible Reading: Matthew 22:15-22

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, You see and know everything, but more importantly, You know everyone. There is no one who is hidden from Your sight; there is no place to hide from Your gaze; there is no one that You do not welcome and receive as guest. We are not so. We know that we overlook those around us who are different, who are not the right "type," who are in the wrong profession, who are somewhat suspect. Forgive us, Lord, for we are looking right past the very people You came to save. Help us that we might have the gift of hospitality for all people, that we might bring in those who are overlooked or forgotten, that we might not miss anyone who is striving to see Jesus in our midst. Give us vision and grace and gratitude this day, so that we might share it with others. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
The Lord will carry those who are weak, the Lord will strength the faithful.  
God will watch over us all the day through.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 125

### **Prayer:**

Today is a day to do other things, a day of change, a day of leisure. In the midst of my relaxing and reveries, remind me this day, Lord, that You have blessed me with abundance. I am able to enjoy Your provisions with a clear conscience and a happy soul because You have kept me in the ways of righteousness. May I never take advantage of my neighbor and may I use all that You have given with a sense of gracious care for those around me. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 111

Bible Reading: Jude 17-25

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Who will be my guest this evening? Who will I welcome into the shelter of my home? Lord, You came and entered into the home of a sinner, much like me. Zacchaeus received You warmly and opened wide not only his home but also his heart. Lord, may I learn the ways of hospitality that I am able to receive everyone with the same respect and care and love with which You have received me. May these four walls be a shelter for all sinners, and may salvation come to this house as well. Prepare me to receive Yourself in worship tomorrow; prepare me that I will be ready to worship in spirit and in truth. I pray in the name of the one who is host for all, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!

You have given me relief when I was in distress.

Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Gracious God, You have carried me through another week. You have taken my cares and burdens upon You, and You have given me grace upon grace in return. I shall never see these days again; I shall have no chance to change or correct what I have said and done. I ask that You bless it, Lord, the good and the bad, the upright and the faulty, so that it may all bring You glory and may guide me towards greater love and life in You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Short verse: Luke 19:9-10, ESV -- And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Ending Prayer: I entrust all that I am and have into Your care, O Lord; grant unto me and all that are in this house this night a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen.

## **Week Two – Turning Points**

### **Monday – Abraham**

Scripture for Monday: Genesis 12:1-9

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan,

6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

8 From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord.

9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Do you think God would have appeared to Abram had he stayed put?

Did Abram find a holy place or was it made holy by God's presence?

What do you think would have been hardest for Abram to leave behind?

Are there places in your own life where you feel closer to God? A special place?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Monday – Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.  
If God be for us, who can be against us?  
There is nothing in all of creation  
That can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 145

Bible Reading: Matthew 22:23-33

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, You called to Abram when he was old, when he was settled, when he was set in his ways. Yet You called him to take a new direction, to go in a fresh path, to follow after You wherever it was that You were leading. What a marvelous faith that will follow to a place as yet unknown! Today, Lord, You have prepared paths for me to follow; I do not clearly see Your way and I cannot know the end; but I do trust that You have touched my life, that You have guided me in times past, that You are leading me to a place of blessing. May I follow today, just as far as You lead and not a step further. May I walk always in Your footsteps. I make my prayer through Jesus Christ, the Way. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
Jesus said, take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,  
For I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 126

Prayer: Abram journeyed on to the Negev, to a dry and dusty land, trusting only You for his provision and refreshment. As we pause during the labor of the day, we are reminded, Lord, that all our efforts are vain unless they are in Your will. By faith You can bless and restore us, by faith You can renew and sustain us. Strengthen us for the tasks that remain to be done this day, and bless us that we may rejoice in Your constant care. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God is light. In God there is no darkness. If we live in the light,  
As God is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 25

Bible Reading: Revelation 1:1-8

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord God, You promised Abram a rich life of blessing—both being blessed and blessing others. You promise us such a life as well, but first we must take the step to set off and follow You. We must leave behind the familiar and settled existence that becomes too attached to this world; we have to journey to a new land by a new path, but we will finally find that it is the only way that leads home. Restore to us Your saving guidance and grace; if we have wandered from the way this day, bring us back to where we must be. Keep us close to You each and every day. Bless us where we have followed faithfully this day, and forgive our missteps. All of this for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

I return to You now, O Lord. I confess that there have been times this day when I have turned away—sometimes knowing it and other times not realizing it. For every thought, word, or deed that was not in keeping with Your will I ask Your forgiveness. Cleanse me of all my offenses, so that I may bask in the blessing of Your salvation this night and forevermore. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Short verse: Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Genesis 12:1-3, ESV

Ending Prayer: Encircle us with Your arms of protection this night; watch over us that we may rest in Your peace and awake in Your presence. Amen.

## **Week Two – Turning Points**

### **Tuesday – Joseph**

Scripture for Tuesday: Genesis 45:1-15

1 Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

2 And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

3 And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

4 So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.

5 And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

6 For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest.

7 And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.

8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry.

10 You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have.

11 There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.'

12 And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you.

13 You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here."

14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck.

15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.



Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Think back over Joseph's story: how many turning points do you see?

How did Joseph 'keep the faith' when so many injustices were happening to him?

What was the effect of Joseph's many trials in the long run?

Have you ever experienced negative consequences for trying to do the right thing?

Have things ever worked out better than you could have expected?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Tuesday – Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.  
If God be for us, who can be against us?  
There is nothing in all of creation  
That can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 146

Bible Reading: Matthew 22:34-46

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, You alone know what the future holds for me; You alone know where this day will lead and where it will end. I am not able to see beyond my many limits. But I trust that You are always at work even in the midst of those days when it seems that everything is going wrong, even when I cannot figure out why things are not turning out right, even when I cannot see the light from the depths of the pits in which I sometimes find myself. Grant me the grace to see all things from Your perspective this day, so that I will not be anxious over things I cannot control, and I will accept events and people as Your agents of guidance. I pray through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forevermore. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
Jesus said, take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,  
For I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 127

Prayer: Our labors are vain, if they are not done to Your glory. All our efforts are useless if they do serve Your purposes. Bless our labors this day, Lord; bless them beyond the measures that we would assign to them, give them lasting value and significance, so that they may be, in some small way, a part of the kingdom that You are building even now. Give us strength, energy, enthusiasm, insight and intelligence to do our work well. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God is light. In God there is no darkness. If we live in the light,  
As God is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 94

Bible Reading: Revelation 1:9-16

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

God of the ages, we realize that it takes time to work Your purposes out, and we know that You are not done with us or those around us. At times You use us to move others so that they might be closer to You; at other times You use others to move us; and yet in all the going and coming You are mysteriously moving us all to the place where we can best serve You. There are many things from this day that are not yet resolved; there are some that feel as if they are complete, and yet they will need more time and attention; there are some that will never amount to anything. Help me trust in You, Lord, so that I can see how all of it works together for good; keep me faithful and patient so that I can remain steadfast in Your love. Through Jesus Christ I ask it. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

I confess, Lord, that I am too quick to judge the motivations and actions of others; too often I look for the worst in people, and then seemed satisfied when I have found it. Forgive me and transform me so that I will always be looking and waiting only for You and Your surprising grace. Turn me around when I need it so that I will be facing forward—facing toward You. May my prayer be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord. Amen.

Short verse: Genesis 45:7-8a -- And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

Ending Prayer: Encircle us with Your arms of protection this night; watch over us that we may rest in Your peace and awake in Your presence. Amen.

## **Week Two – Turning Points**

### **Wednesday – Elijah**

Scripture for Wednesday: I Kings 19:1-18

- 1 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.
- 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow."
- 3 Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.
- 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."
- 5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat."
- 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again.
- 7 And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you."
- 8 And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.
- 9 There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
- 10 He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."
- 11 And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.
- 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.
- 13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
- 14 He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."
- 15 And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria.
- 16 And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.
- 17 And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death.
- 18 Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Have you had occasion when you felt as if you were all alone?

Have you ever felt that God had placed too heavy a burden upon you?

Do you usually hear God in the amazing and extraordinary, or in the small and subtle?

Do you find times to spend alone with God?

Do you enjoy solitude?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Wednesday – Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.  
If God be for us, who can be against us?  
There is nothing in all of creation  
That can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 147:1-11

Bible Reading: Matthew 23:1-12

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, there are times when it feels pretty lonely to be on Your side; there are times when it seems there are so many in the world who do not honor You; there are times when it seems as if it might not be worth it to do Your will and live in Your way. There will be times today when I will be tempted to throw in the towel and take the broad way that leads along the world's paths. Help me that I might hear Your voice today, Lord. Help me that I might have the courage and strength to obey You. Guide me along the way that will prove most blessed this day, Lord. All of this I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
Jesus said, take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,  
For I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 127

Prayer: Lord, the day is moving along and I am moving along too. I am trying to do what You would have done; I am trying to do it in a way that brings You honor. I am trying to do it all in the right ways. Watch over me now, Lord, and guide my thoughts, words, and actions that all I do this day may be a source of blessing for all those around me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God is light. In God there is no darkness. If we live in the light,  
As God is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 53

Bible Reading: Revelation 1:17-2:7

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Gracious God, in Your prophet Elijah we see both fear and fearlessness; we see both boldness and timidity; we see both daring and hiding. We confess, Lord, that we are not always strong in spirit; too often we go along with the crowd, too often we give in to the small temptations that seem so harmless, too often we think that we can go our own way and everything will be fine. Help us that we might trust more and more in You and Your care; help us that we might listen more and more even in the stillness and silence that You offer us. Bless what we have done this day that it might be in keeping with Your will; watch over us as this day fades; assist us to see and appreciate where You have been in our lives this day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

I confess, Lord, that I am too quick to judge the motivations and actions of others; too often I look for the worst in people, and then seemed satisfied when I have found it. Forgive me and transform me so that I will always be looking and waiting only for You and Your surprising grace. Turn me around when I need it so that I will be facing forward—facing toward You. May my prayer be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord. Amen.

Short verse: I Kings 19:12, ESV -- 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.

Ending Prayer: Encircle us with Your arms of protection this night; watch over us that we may rest in Your peace and awake in Your presence. Amen.

## Week Two – Turning Points

### Thursday – Jonah

Scripture for Thursday: Jonah 1:1-17

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."

3 But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

4 But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.

5 Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.

6 So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."

7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

8 Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

9 And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

11 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous.

12 He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you."

13 Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

14 Therefore they called out to the Lord, "O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you."

15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

17 And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.



Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

How common do you think is Jonah's first reaction to being called by God?

Have you ever felt that God picked you for some difficult duty?

How far are you willing to go to "calm the storms and smooth the seas" around you?

Do you tend to hold fast to a position or opinion, or are you more likely to go along to get along? Which was Jonah?

Jonah is willing to go to great lengths to avoid God's call; God is willing to go to greater lengths to insure that he fulfills it. Is that encouraging to you?

What has God "thrown at you" to make you change direction in the past?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Thursday – Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.  
If God be for us, who can be against us?  
There is nothing in all of creation  
That can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 147:12-20

Bible Reading: Matthew 23:13-26

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Almighty God, You call us by name; You address us as individuals; You call each of us to specific tasks, even those things which are demanding and difficult. We confess that we are prone to be like Jonah; we are likely to run the other direction when we sense danger or difficulty; we look for the easy out. I ask you to help me this day, Lord, that I might step towards You, that I might see the narrow way that leads to life, that I might be ready to proclaim Your word of hope and assurance to a world in need. I know that I cannot do this alone nor in my own strength or skill; guard me from dangers both within and without this day; guide me further along the pilgrim way; keep watch over my life that in all ways it might fulfill Your will and bring You glory. I humbly ask it, O Lord. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
Jesus said, take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,  
For I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 129

### **Midday Prayer:**

Lord, many things seem to work against me at times; often I feel like I am rowing against the tide and against the wind; often I am not sure that I am making any progress at all. I come seeking Your blessing once again; bless the labors of my hands that they may be done well; bless the labors of my mind that they be wise; bless the labors of my heart that they may bring joy and blessing to others. Grant me an attitude of faith and courage for the living of this day, that I may live it well and unto You. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God is light. In God there is no darkness. If we live in the light,  
As God is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 62

Bible Reading: Revelation 2:8-17

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord God, Jonah was three days in the belly of the fish, three days of darkness and loneliness and isolation away from the light and from people's sight—and yet You were watching him the whole time. Jesus was three days in the tomb, three days of darkness and loneliness and isolation away from the light and from people's sight—and yet You were with him even in death. Remind us again, Lord, that we cannot flee from You, nor should we want to. Remind us again, Lord, that the only way through the challenges that face us is to grow to deeper and deeper levels of trust in You. Remind us again, Lord, that You will keep us through all danger and distress until You bring us to that place in which we will find Your richest blessing. We praise You, O God, now and forever. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Mighty and merciful God, You preserve us even when we resist You; You protect us even when we would throw caution to the wind; You provide for us even when we have disregarded Your gifts. Your love is more than we deserve; Your grace is beyond our understanding; Your patience amazes and astounds us. Forgive us wherein we have failed You this day. Grant us time to amend our ways and fulfill Your will for our lives and those around us. We ask through Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Short verse: Jonah 1:9, ESV -- And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

Ending Prayer: Encircle us with Your arms of protection this night; watch over us that we may rest in Your peace and awake in Your presence. Amen.

## **Week Two – Turning Points**

### **Friday – Nicodemus**

Scripture for Friday: John 3:1-21, ESV

- 1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.
- 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."
- 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."
- 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"
- 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
- 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
- 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'
- 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."
- 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"
- 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?
- 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.
- 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?
- 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.
- 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
- 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.
- 16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.
- 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
- 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.
- 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.
- 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

What famous person would you like to meet? Why? What impact have they had on you?

Who have you met that has had the greatest impact on your life to this point?

Why was Nicodemus willing to risk meeting with Jesus?

What did Nicodemus hope to take away from this encounter? Was he successful?

Did John 3:16 play any role in your own spiritual development?

What does it mean to you that God loves you? Can you put it in words?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Friday – Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.  
If God be for us, who can be against us?  
There is nothing in all of creation  
That can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 148

Bible Reading: Matthew 23:27-39

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, the darkness is gone and a new day has dawned. Light has scattered the shadows and now we can see clearly. A new day is born and we are blessed to see it. Your Word, the Living Word, has shown into our world the great good news of Your love for us. We rejoice that Jesus has come among us and that the Living God has taken on human flesh that we might see the divine in the midst of the daily. We rejoice that Jesus hallowed all of human life so that everything we do matters to You. We rejoice that the light has shined into our lives and the darkness cannot overcome it. Help us, Lord, that we might walk this day in light, that we might speak this day in truth, that we might love this day with some small measure of the same love that You have for us, the same love that You revealed in Jesus the Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
Jesus said, take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,  
For I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 130

### **Midday Prayer:**

Gracious God, You are a forgiving God and You do not look upon us in our sin, but in the light of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. You see in us a glory that we cannot see ourselves. You see in us potential and power that we miss. You see in us something more than we will ever see in this life. Instruct and inspire us this day, that we may become more and more like what You see; illumine our hearts and minds that we may walk in Your light this day and always. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God is light. In God there is no darkness. If we live in the light,  
As God is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 16

Bible Reading: Revelation 2:18-29

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord of light and life, in You we see light, in You we see life, in You we see love greater than any we can know in this world. We live so much of our lives on the most mundane of levels; we rarely look beyond the surface of things; we usually find the uniformity of things and strive to keep it that way. You, Lord, have burst into our world with the power and depth and presence of new life; You reveal a deep dynamic that drives us towards You; You release us from the bonds of darkness and confinement of our small worlds so that we can experience a freshness and newness that startles us. Once we have been in touch with You our worlds are no longer dark, no longer small, no longer of our own making. Pour Your Spirit of life into us that we might truly learn to live this day and always. Renew us, refresh us, revive us that our lives might show forth Your light. We pray through Christ, Your Son and our Lord. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

The day is done, the darkness of night returns, but we confess that we have light in the Son of God. By Your Spirit expose to us those deeds which we have done that bear any degree of darkness so that we may confess and renounce them. By Your Spirit shine Your grace upon all that we have done that is in keeping with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his name we pray. Amen.

Short verse: John 3:16, ESV -- 16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Ending Prayer: Encircle us with Your arms of protection this night; watch over us that we may rest in Your peace and awake in Your presence. Amen.

## **Week Two – Turning Points**

### **Saturday – Paul**

Scripture for Saturday: Acts 9:1-19, ESV

- 1 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest
- 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.
- 3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.
- 4 And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"
- 5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.
- 6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."
- 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.
- 8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.
- 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.
- 10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."
- 11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,
- 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."
- 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem.
- 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name."
- 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.
- 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."
- 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."
- 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;
- 19 and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.



Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

What events in your life have stopped you 'dead in your tracks'?

When has God called you to 'turn around'?

How do you think Saul felt as he was sitting in darkness, not knowing if he would see again?

Have you ever had an Ananias who came to help you during a dramatic time in your life?

Have you ever been an Ananias for someone else?

Are you presently on 'easy street' or a 'rough road' in your spiritual life?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Saturday – Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare Your praise.  
If God be for us, who can be against us?  
There is nothing in all of creation  
That can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 149

Bible Reading: Matthew 24:1-14

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, we begin the day with our plans and projections; we start the day with an idea of where we're going and how we're going to get there; we plan our work and work our plan like most of the world around us. We could go about our business as if nothing was amiss. Stop us, Lord, if we are not on the right path; keep us from going in the wrong directions; move us in the ways that will draw us closer to You and Your people. May we hear Your voice without hesitation and may we follow Your instructions without delay. May each encounter with You touch our lives in ways large and small so that we are finally conformed to Your image in us. We pray through Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
Jesus said, take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,  
For I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 131

### **Midday Prayer:**

O Lord, humble me this day so that I may willingly obey Your instructions to me. Help me that I might trust You in all the tasks and duties to which You call me. Remind me to turn to You again and again and again lest I lose the way and pursue those things which would cause me to forget You. By the power of Your Holy Spirit illumine my mind, my eyes, and my way this day. I ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God is light. In God there is no darkness. If we live in the light,  
As God is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 72

Bible Reading: Revelation 3:1-6

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Mighty God, You are able to do more than we realize; You are able to present Yourself in powerful ways; You are able to change our hearts and minds and ways in an instant. We acknowledge Your might and marvelous power. We are also mindful, Lord, that You can turn us in small and subtle ways—often without our truly noticing it. As we think back on the day we have had, we realize that in any number of decisions and thoughts and actions You have been moving us in Your direction. You push and nudge and ease us along so that we might eventually arrive at that place where we, like Saul, might be fully transformed into a servant for all people; for all of that we give You thanks. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, whom Saul persecuted, Paul praised, and You glorified forevermore. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Answer me when I call, O God of righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4)

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Almighty God, the night has fallen, the day is done, and our activities cease so that we might rest. We have sinned against You this day, O Lord, by what we have done and what we have left undone; we have missed opportunities to proclaim Your truth; we have ignored chances to serve others; we have not loved You with our whole heart, mind, and strength. Forgive us and cleanse us that we may rest in Your mercy and rise refreshed in Your grace. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Short verse: Acts 9:18-19 -- 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; 19 and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

Ending Prayer: Encircle us with Your arms of protection this night; watch over us that we may rest in Your peace and awake in Your presence. Amen.

## **Week Three – Covenant Relations**

### **Monday – Abraham**

Scripture for Monday: Genesis 17:1-27

- 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless,
- 2 that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."
- 3 Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him,
- 4 "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.
- 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.
- 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.
- 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.
- 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."
- 9 And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.
- 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.
- 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.
- 12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring,
- 13 both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.
- 14 Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."
- 15 And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.
- 16 I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."
- 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"
- 18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!"
- 19 God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.
- 20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.
- 21 But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this

time next year."

22 When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

23 Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him.

24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

26 That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised.

27 And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

So Abram become Abraham and Sarai becomes Sarah; have you ever experienced a change of name or address or title?

Abraham and Sarah both initially laughed at what God was telling them; have you ever had a similar response to something someone said about you and your prospects?

Is there something more to this covenant than just circumcision? Something on the inside?

What is the difference between a covenant and a contract?

Are there symbols in your life that remind you of your relationship with God? Where do you keep such things?

What is the most obvious display of your faith that you make before others?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

God alone is the Creator—from the first light to the first light of this day.  
God has granted us a new day in which to live before Him.  
God has granted us a new day in which to love others around us.  
God has granted us a new day in which to share the good news of the gospel.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: 145

Bible Reading: Luke 1:1-25

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Almighty God, You called Abram to become Abraham, the father of many nations; You were not content to leave him to wander and roam without a land and a home. You promised that You would be with him always, and Your promises never fail. We remember this day that You have promised never to leave or forsake us either, Lord. You are with us now and will be with us throughout the hours ahead; You have prepared paths for our journey; You have given us signs of Your presence and providence along the way. May we follow You this day and always. May we never forget Your steadfast love and enduring faithfulness to all that You have covenanted to do. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to selfish gain.  
Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things, and give me life in Your ways.  
(Psa.119:26-27, ESV)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 120

### **Prayer:**

O Lord, there is much work to be done; there are many commitments that have to be kept; there are duties that seem to not end in this life. Yet, You call us to be ready to do the new thing that You have in mind—to walk in new paths, to open new relationships, to envision a new life. You have committed to be with us in the midst of all of this. Help us, Lord, that we might be faithful to You in all that we do. Bless our labors in Your behalf for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
You are with me always, O Lord; You hold my right hand.  
You guide me with counsel and You will eventually receive me into glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but You?  
There is nothing on earth I desire but You, O Lord! (based on Psalm 73:24-25)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 40

Bible Reading: Titus 1:1-16

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord God, the sun has run its course for another day; the evening is fast upon us; as the rays of light fade from the sky we rest from our labors and turn our hearts to You. Truly You are the God who keeps covenant forever; You are the God who is faithful in all circumstances; You are the one who has kept us in life and makes covenant to keep us in life eternal. Even this day we have seen the signs of Your faithful care—You have provided for us; we have food to eat; we have shelter from the elements; we have loved ones who care for us; we have the hope and assurance of life everlasting. Give us grateful hearts, O God; receive the praise of Your people; remain with us always so that we may know Your love and grace. Through our Lord Jesus Christ we make our prayer. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Come bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Eternal God, You are holy and faithful and Your word is sure forever. I confess, Lord, that there are ways in which I have not kept faith this day; I have been distracted by the daily demands of lesser things; I have not kept Your word constantly before me; I have not lived fully unto You. Forgive me, cleanse me, keep me in Your care. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Short verse: Genesis 17:9 -- And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.

Ending Prayer: The Lord never sleeps nor slumbers; the Lord will keep watch this night over me and those I love; the Lord will bless my lying down and my rising again. Bless the Lord!

## Week Three – Covenant Relations

### Tuesday – Jacob

Scripture for Tuesday: Genesis 32:22-32

- 22 The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.
- 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had.
- 24 And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.
- 25 When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.
- 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."
- 27 And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."
- 28 Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."
- 29 Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him.
- 30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."
- 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.
- 32 Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Why are names so important in the Bible? Are they just as important in life?

Jacob, the Heel, becomes Israel, the one who wrestles with God; does this name fit him better than his earlier name?

When have you felt alone and wrestling with someone/something greater than yourself?

Although this might not be a covenant in the strictest sense, it is certainly a contact with God for Jacob; what has been the experience in your life where you were closest to the face of God?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.



## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

God alone is the Creator—from the first light to the first light of this day.  
God has granted us a new day in which to live before Him.  
God has granted us a new day in which to love others around us.  
God has granted us a new day in which to share the good news of the gospel.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 146

Bible Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

God of Glory, the morning is breaking and the night is fleeing away. You have been with us in the midst of our darkness and our dreams. We have wrestled with matters in our minds and have confronted issues within our conscience; we sleep but we are still always alive. Like Jacob we awake to a new day with new possibilities; we are not bound by the dreams of yesterdays and nights that have long passed. We are free to go forth as those who can trust in You and Your blessing; we are free to leave behind those deeds and decisions that led us down the wrong paths; we are free this day to walk in the paths of light and life. Go before us, God, that we might take the right steps, that we might remain close to You, that we might be a blessing to others rather than a burden to any. This we ask in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences: (Psa.119:26-27, ESV)**

Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to selfish gain.  
Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things, and give me life in Your ways.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 121

### **Prayer:**

Lord God, in the garden we rebelled against You and severed the relationship that You had intended. We turned from You and brought upon ourselves the curse of sin. We labor and toil for our bread; we struggle for our sustenance; we wrestle with others to satisfy our needs and our wants. Help us this day, Lord, that we may conduct ourselves as Your chosen people so that others may see Your life within us and be drawn to You. For Jesus' sake we ask it, Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
You are with me always, O Lord; You hold my right hand.  
You guide me with counsel and You will eventually receive me into glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but You?  
There is nothing on earth I desire but You, O Lord! (based on Psalm 73:24-25)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 94

Bible Reading: Titus 2:1-10

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord, words cannot express the love You have for us. Your steadfast love is more precious to us than life itself, for Your love will endure forever. We have been blessed this day with joy from the rivers of delight that flow from Your throne. We have feasted on the abundance of the fields of Your blessing. We have rejoiced in the love and care of those around us whom You have placed in our lives for us to bless and for us to receive blessing from them. I marvel at the mysteries of Your glory and grace, O Lord! I am moved by the mercies that You show to me day by day. My heart rejoices to sing Your praise this evening. May my love for You grow day by day; may my life be more and more a witness to Your ways; may I never forget Your faithfulness. To You be the honor and glory and praise forevermore. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Come bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Mighty God, in my striving to follow You this day, I confess that I have failed in many ways. It is a struggle to live in a way that always pleases You. I confess that I stand in need of Your mercy and grace once again, for only in You will I find the resolution of my wrestling with sin and self; only in You will I discover what my life truly is. Cleanse me and help me, Lord. Amen.

Short verse: Genesis 32:28 -- Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Ending Prayer: The Lord never sleeps nor slumbers; the Lord will keep watch this night over me and those I love; the Lord will bless my lying down and my rising again. Bless the Lord!

## Week Three – Covenant Relations

### Wednesday – Moses

Scripture for Wednesday: Exodus 19:1-8

- 1 On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.
- 2 They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain,
- 3 while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel:
- 4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.
- 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;
- 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."
- 7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him.
- 8 All the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

What differences do you notice between this conversation with God and Moses' earlier conversation in Exodus 3?

How do you feel when someone has done something special for you? Do you feel obliged?

What are the conditions that God places on His relationship with the people of Israel?

Did they fulfill the conditions that God had asked?

In what ways does our relationship with God depend on our obedience?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

God alone is the Creator—from the first light to the first light of this day.  
God has granted us a new day in which to live before Him.  
God has granted us a new day in which to love others around us.  
God has granted us a new day in which to share the good news of the gospel.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 147:1-11

Bible Reading: Luke 1:39-48a

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, holy One of Israel, You brought the people of Israel out of Egypt with a strong and powerful hand; You revealed Your wonders to the people; You poured Your spirit and strength upon Moses that he might be their leaders. Moses talked with You about all things. Now, Lord, You have called to me to serve You as well. You have chosen me to help lead the people of God in this place. Without Your Spirit and strength I will not be able to do what You ask; without Your presence and power I will not be able to perform the tasks to which You call me now. Help me this day, Lord, that I might be obedient to Your calling, that I might be mindful of Your commands, that I might be firm in my faith in You, so that through all I do You may receive honor and glory and Your people may know blessings abounding. I ask through Christ, my Lord. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences: (Psa.119:26-27, ESV)**

Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to selfish gain.  
Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things, and give me life in Your ways.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 122

### **Prayer:**

Lord God, You brought us into a land of freedom so that we could serve You alone and turn away from the idols and gods of the Egyptians. You released us for a new life. Just as we rebelled in the garden, we failed in the wilderness; we grumbled against Moses and You; we would have preferred a life of slavery rather than following You in an adventure to reach the promised land. Tend my heart and mind this day, Lord, that I may be obedient and even joyfully obedient. Guide me in Your way that I may help others reach the place of Your promise. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
You are with me always, O Lord; You hold my right hand.  
You guide me with counsel and You will eventually receive me into glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but You?  
There is nothing on earth I desire but You, O Lord! (based on Psalm 73:24-25)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: 53

Bible Reading: Titus 2:11-3:8a

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Great Jehovah, You guided Moses and the people of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness awaiting a place that You had promised. You provided manna and quail and water and all that would sustain them along the way. You traveled with before them and behind them so that they would remain in Your way. You asked their obedience and promised Your blessing. You tested them and prepared them so that they might rely fully on You in all things. You have gone before us this day; You have tested us again; You have provided for us once again; Lord we acknowledge that our obedience is often lacking, our faith often fails us, our relationship with You is not always our highest priority. We thank You that Your love never fails, even when we do; we praise You that Your provision is always sure; we adore You as our Lord and God, our refuge and shelter. We pray through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God forever and ever. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Come bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Lord, we have sinned against You in thought, word and deed this day. Only You can forgive us, only You can redeem us, only You can save us. We beseech You to do so, not for our sakes, but for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord and hope always. Amen.

Short verse: Exodus 19:5-6a -- Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Ending Prayer: The Lord never sleeps nor slumbers; the Lord will keep watch this night over me and those I love; the Lord will bless my lying down and my rising again. Bless the Lord!

## Week Three – Covenant Relations

### Thursday -- Joshua

Scripture for Thursday: Joshua 24:1-28

1 Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God.

2 And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.

3 Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac.

4 And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.

5 And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it, and afterward I brought you out.

6 " 'Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea. And the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea.

7 And when they cried to the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness a long time.

8 Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan. They fought with you, and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you.

9 Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel. And he sent and invited Balaam the son of Beor to curse you,

10 but I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand.

11 And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand.

12 And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow.

13 I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.'

14 "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.

15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

16 Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods,

17 for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed.

18 And the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land.

Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

19 But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins.

20 If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good."

21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the Lord."

22 Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses."

23 He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel."

24 And the people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey."

25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem.

26 And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.

27 And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God."

28 So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

This passage starts with a long list of God's protection and blessing upon Israel as a reminder; what had God done for them to this point?

If you were to compose your own list of God's blessings to you right now what would be on that list?

What are the conditions that Israel is to fulfill in this covenant?

Are there conditions that come into play in your own relationship with God? What are they?

Do we, in fact, choose each day whom we will serve? When and how do we choose?

Are there times when you have renewed your relationship with God?

Are there signs or symbols of that renewed relationship that you keep before you?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

God alone is the Creator—from the first light to the first light of this day.  
God has granted us a new day in which to live before Him.  
God has granted us a new day in which to love others around us.  
God has granted us a new day in which to share the good news of the gospel.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 147:12-20

Bible Reading: Luke 1:57-66

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, You have always gone before Your people; You have always protected and provided for them; You have granted grace that was undeserved. We thank you this day for the countless ways in which we have been blessed. We cannot recount all the times when You have cared for us. We cannot know what it is that we truly owe You for Your love for us. So help us this day, and this day alone, Lord, that we might lift up Your praises, that we might live for You in all ways, that we might fulfill the vows and promises that we make to You. Fill my mind and heart with such awareness of Your presence this day that I may know the joy of relationship with You, and so that others around me may see that relationship and desire You all the more. I ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences: (Psa.119:26-27, ESV)**

Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to selfish gain.  
Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things, and give me life in Your ways.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 123

### **Prayer:**

Holy God, I have already made dozens of choices this day—some small, some large, some that will matter in the long run, and some that will be forgotten before I sleep this night. At this moment I have chosen to pray and remember that You are with me in the midst of all those choices—that, too, is a choice I make. Tend to my decisions, Lord, watch over my thoughts and feelings that I may always seek to choose Your way above all else. Tend to my heart as well that I may love You above all else and live in the light of Your love this day and always. Amen.



## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
You are with me always, O Lord; You hold my right hand.  
You guide me with counsel and You will eventually receive me into glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but You?  
There is nothing on earth I desire but You, O Lord! (based on Psalm 73:24-25)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 126

Bible Reading: Galatians 3:1-14

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Holy God, You are working to bring us to the places of Your choosing; You are moving us in the direction of Your destination; You are faithful to us always; You are steadfast in all Your ways. We are still on our journey, still moving forward, still longing for that place of rest and peace that will only come when we are fully with You. We thank You for guiding us this day; we thank You for the progress that we have made this day; we thank You for each small step that brings us closer to You. As the daylight fades and the night descends, may we reaffirm our commitment and covenant with You; may we remember Your graces of this day and be renewed for mission and service. Hear our prayers, O Lord, for we pray through Christ Jesus, Your Son and our Savior. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Come bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Lord, both in what I have chosen and what I have not chosen this day, I have sinned against You. I have gone astray along the way and perhaps led others astray as well. Forgive me, Lord, for I forget Your faithfulness and strength for me; cleanse my heart and mind this night that I may rest only in Your grace and mercy, now and always. Amen.

Short verse: Joshua 24:15 -- And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Ending Prayer: The Lord never sleeps nor slumbers; the Lord will keep watch this night over me and those I love; the Lord will bless my lying down and my rising again. Bless the Lord!

## Week Three – Covenant Relations

### Friday – David

Scripture for Friday: 2 Samuel 7:1-17

- 1 Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies,
- 2 the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent."
- 3 And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you."
- 4 But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan,
- 5 "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in?
- 6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling.
- 7 In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"'
- 8 Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel.
- 9 And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.
- 10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly,
- 11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.
- 12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.
- 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.
- 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men,
- 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.
- 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.' "
- 17 In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

What is the difference between a God who moves with you from place to place and a God that seems tied to a building? Is there a difference?

David wanted to do something good for God; did God do something better for David?

Have you ever intended to do something good but you were interrupted from doing so?

Are there conditions to God's covenant with David?

How does this covenant affect what happens with Jesus Christ?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

God alone is the Creator—from the first light to the first light of this day.  
God has granted us a new day in which to live before Him.  
God has granted us a new day in which to love others around us.  
God has granted us a new day in which to share the good news of the gospel.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 148

Bible Reading: Luke 1:67-80

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

O Lord of Hosts, You are high and lifted up; You are exalted above the earth; You are greater than all that we see and can know. Yet, You have called us to be with You; You have journeyed with us along our way; You have brought us to those places in which we learned to trust You more fully; You will bring us at last to be with You always. We thank and praise You, O God, for Your guidance. You direct our thoughts and dreams and desires; may they all be pleasing in Your sight and helpful in our pilgrimage. You have prepared a place of joy and light and life forevermore; You are taking us there, while bringing us to Yourself. May every thought, word, and deed of this day bring me closer. May I see Your faithfulness along my way this day. I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences: (Psa.119:26-27, ESV)**

Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to selfish gain.  
Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things, and give me life in Your ways.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 124

### **Prayer:**

In You alone, O Lord, do we find the strength for the tasks of this life. In You alone do we have the help we need for holy living. We pause now and remember that You have been with us; You have chosen us as part of Your people; You have elected to watch over us and make us Your own. We ask Your blessing for the tasks of this day; may we do them well, may we do them honestly, may we do them all to Your glory, may we do them as a means of Your grace to others around us. Pour Your blessing upon us so that You may be glorified in our lives. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
You are with me always, O Lord; You hold my right hand.  
You guide me with counsel and You will eventually receive me into glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but You?  
There is nothing on earth I desire but You, O Lord! (based on Psalm 73:24-25)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 130

Bible Reading: Galatians 3:15-22

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

O Lord, my God, day by day You teach me Your ways; day by day Your grace guides me along the way; day by day Your mercies are renewed and displayed before my eyes. Your instruction is worth more than all what the world calls 'wisdom,' Your truth is more valuable than all the world's 'knowledge,' Your guidance is greater than any on earth. Humble me, Lord, that I may have a teachable spirit, that I may long for Your commandments, that I may seek first Your paths above all others. Do in my heart and spirit those things that will redeem me and restore me to Your good favor; transform me into a good and upright servant that I may willingly serve You always. I ask through Christ, my Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Come bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Forgive me, Lord, for I have served my own dreams and desires this day; I have thought more and sought more for what I want than for what You want for me. I need You to redeem my imagination and dreams that I may serve You in all things. Cleanse me, redeem me, refresh me—all so that I may live more fully as You desire. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Short verse: II Samuel 7:16 -- And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'

Ending Prayer: The Lord never sleeps nor slumbers; the Lord will keep watch this night over me and those I love; the Lord will bless my lying down and my rising again. Bless the Lord!

## **Week Three – Covenant Relations**

### **Saturday – Jeremiah**

Scripture for Saturday: Jeremiah 31:31-34

31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,

32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Israel was unable to keep the covenant made in Sinai; what would make this covenant different?

What are the conditions of this covenant?

In which way does God speak most clearly—the external commandments or the internal conscience? Which is most important to you?

Is there still a need to teach one another about the Lord?

Does God's forgetting our sin stand in contrast to our notions of judgment?

Do we remember our sin more than God does?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

God alone is the Creator—from the first light to the first light of this day.  
God has granted us a new day in which to live before Him.  
God has granted us a new day in which to love others around us.  
God has granted us a new day in which to share the good news of the gospel.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 90

Bible Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Loving Lord, our hearts desire You more than anything! Our souls cry out to You with longing and yearning to be in Your presence always. Lord, You know that my head and my heart do not always agree; what I think and what I feel are not always consistent; my thoughts often take me far from You; my feelings are often not what I would want them to be. Assist me this day, Lord, that You might work within my heart those things which would make me more holy and more conformed to Your image. Write upon my heart the words that will bring peace and blessing; erase from my mind those things that bring contention and confusion. I ask this through Jesus Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection give me hope this day and always. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences: (Psa.119:26-27, ESV)**

Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to selfish gain.  
Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things, and give me life in Your ways.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 125

### **Prayer:**

Almighty God, I pray that You would embrace me this day. Encircle my mind within the mind of Christ that I might think Your thoughts. Encircle my heart within the heart of Christ, that I might feel Your compassion; encircle my hands this day that they may only do what will bring You honor; encircle my feet this day that they may only tread the paths You have prepared; encircle my life that in all ways I may live this day for You and for You alone. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
You are with me always, O Lord; You hold my right hand.  
You guide me with counsel and You will eventually receive me into glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but You?  
There is nothing on earth I desire but You, O Lord! (based on Psalm 73:24-25)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 80

Bible Reading: Galatians 3:23-4:7

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

God of all time and eternity, You have given us this day which is now drawing to its close. You have been with us in it that we might learn the ways of Your love. You are with us now that we might never be removed from You. It is true, Lord, that we do not live each day fully; we strive for that which does not last; we labor for that which moth and rust consume; we expend our energies in pursuit of what we think would make us happy, all the while ignoring those things that could make us holy. We look for better days ahead and miss the only day that You give to us--today. As this day ends, we pray that You grant us glimpses of eternity so that we might measure all things by Your standards. We offer back to You what we have done this day for Your blessing or correction; we offer ourselves to You as completely as we know how; receive us as Your children, for Christ's sake. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Come bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Everything in my life is need of Your forgiveness and correction, O Lord. All that is within me and around and about me needs Your touch and Your grace. To You alone do I turn for help, to You alone do I turn for mercy, to You alone do I turn to be made into what You would have me be. Complete in me that which You have begun in Christ Jesus for His glory. Amen.

Short verse: Jeremiah 31:33 -- But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Ending Prayer: The Lord never sleeps nor slumbers; the Lord will keep watch this night over me and those I love; the Lord will bless my lying down and my rising again. Bless the Lord!



## Week Four – Commandments

### Monday – The Fall

Scripture for Monday: Genesis 3:1-24, ESV

- 1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"
- 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,
- 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' "
- 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.
- 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
- 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.
- 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.
- 8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.
- 9 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"
- 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."
- 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"
- 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."
- 13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."
- 14 The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.
- 15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."
- 16 To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."
- 17 And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
- 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.
- 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

20 The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.  
21 And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—"

23 therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.

24 He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

What was it that Adam and Eve found so tempting in this story?

Who deceived them? The serpent? Or they, themselves?

What was the consequence of their disobedience?

Are there always negative consequences for disobedience?

Have you ever 'hidden' because of your own disobedience? When? Where?

How should the church deal with discipline and disobedience?

Are you comfortable with the idea that you may be called upon to discipline others?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, by Your command the sun comes forth to begin the new day.  
By Your Word the earth is renewed and refreshed with life.  
By Your will we are allowed life and the good graces You give.  
By Your wisdom we are guided to walk in Your ways this day and always.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 145

Bible Reading: Acts 7:59-8:8

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, we acknowledge that like Adam and Eve, we, too, are tempted to know and see and do more than we ought. We want to be in control; we want to know it all; we want to see ourselves at the top of every hill. Help us this day, O Lord, that we might learn more and more to walk humbly with You; that we might learn to follow rather than run ahead; that we might learn to serve rather than seek to have everyone and everything serve our ends. Open my heart even now, Lord, that I may learn obedience, that I may hear what it is that You would say to me today, and that in hearing I would be ready to heed each and every direction. All of this I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart  
Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14, ESV)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 126

### **Prayer:**

Mighty and merciful God, the day is only half-spent and already I see and know the disobedience that pervades my life. I have turned from You and done those things that would bring You dishonor; my disobedience is not pleasing in Your sight and it is not pleasant in my soul. Help me now, Lord, help me that I may heed Your words and do as You direct through the remainder of this day and always. For the sake of Jesus Christ, I ask it. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord!

I will keep Your statutes. I call to You; save me, that I may observe Your testimonies. (Ps. 119:145-146, ESV)

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 119:1-24

Bible Reading: Acts 6:1-7

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Almighty God, You have carried me through another day; You have guided me along my way; You have provided nourishment and nurture for my body and soul. I give You thanks, Lord, for all that I realize You have done and all that You are doing that remains unknown to me. I recognize that there is sin in the world; all around me I see and hear of evil and violence and wickedness. I recognize that there is sin in me; within there are thoughts and ideas and words that do not lead to life. I praise You that in Jesus Christ You have offered a way of forgiveness for the world and for me; I praise You that in Jesus Christ we have learned of Your love and grace; I praise You that You have revealed this marvelous mercy even to me. Forgive me, cleanse me, and renew me for the life that You desire. I ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

The one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'You are my refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.'

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Holy God, I have sinned against You in thought, word and deed this very day; I am worthy of Your punishment and deserving of Your wrath. I confess my sins, Lord, knowing that it is only through the grace of Christ Jesus that I have any hope of Your forgiveness. For his sake humble me, redeem me, and restore me. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen.

Short verse: Genesis 3:22a -- 22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.

### **Ending Prayer:**

Dear Lord, help me rest in Your love and grace knowing that You alone can forgive, and You are willing through Jesus Christ to do so. May my rest this night be peaceful and a foreshadowing of our eternal rest with You. In Christ, I pray. Amen.

## **Week Four – Commandments**

### **Tuesday – The Ten Commandments**

Scripture for Monday: Exodus 20:1-21, ESV

- 1 And God spoke all these words, saying,
- 2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
- 3 "You shall have no other gods before me.
- 4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.
- 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,
- 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.
- 7 "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.
- 8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work,
- 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.
- 11 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
- 12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.
- 13 "You shall not murder.
- 14 "You shall not commit adultery.
- 15 "You shall not steal.
- 16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- 17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."
- 18 Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off
- 19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."
- 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin."
- 21 The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Which of the commandments concerning our relationship with God do you find most demanding? Difficult?

Which of the commandments concerning our relationship with God do you find the easiest to keep? Why?

Which of the commandments concerning our relationship with others do you find most demanding? Difficult?

Which of the commandments concerning our relationship with others do you find the easiest to keep? Why?

Is it possible to state the “thou shalt not”s in a positive way?

What was God’s intent in giving us these simple statements?

What is the purpose and value of the commandments today?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, by Your command the sun comes forth to begin the new day.  
By Your Word the earth is renewed and refreshed with life.  
By Your will we are allowed life and the good graces You give.  
By Your wisdom we are guided to walk in Your ways this day and always.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 146

Bible Reading: John 13:20-35

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, all around us we see the signs of disobedience; the news is filled with stories of rebellion and revolt; there are stories of murder and lying and adultery and theft and deceit; there are stories of those who are vilified and experience violence because they are different; there are stories of children who are rebelling against their parents and parents who have abused their children. Help us, Lord, for we are in such need of Your care. Teach us that we may truly learn the ways that lead to life; aid us that we might follow Your law this day and find ourselves closer to You and to one another; instruct us that we might gain wisdom and knowledge; restrain us that we might be kept from sin and the havoc that it causes in our lives and in our world. All this we ask through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart  
Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14, ESV)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 127

### **Prayer:**

Lord, we labor so often for that which seems to come to nothing; we work on projects that seem to prove obsolete as soon as they are ready to launch; we strive and struggle for that which does not last; we exhaust ourselves on matters that will not endure past today. Give us a heart of wisdom, Lord, that we may put our efforts into those things that will last; help us that we might pass along to others the life-giving ways of Your Laws; teach us that we may teach others the heritage we have from You. For Your glory we ask it. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord!

I will keep Your statutes. I call to You; save me, that I may observe Your testimonies. (Ps. 119:145-146, ESV)

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 19

Bible Reading: I John 5:1-12

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord God of All, You alone are the one who must be heard and obeyed. You alone are the one who has the words of life. You alone are the one who is able to bless and keep us beyond this life into life eternal. We acknowledge, Lord, that there are many in our world who call for our allegiance, who desire our praise and tributes, who long for power so that they may lord it over others, who create rules and regulations that will support them and bring hardship and harm to others. But we acknowledge and acclaim You to be Lord of all, ruler of heaven and earth, the eternal One who guides and directs the ways and courses of humankind. Help us that we might give You all the honor and praise that due Your Holy name in all ways in our lives, so that we may at last come to life everlasting with You in the glory of Your promised kingdom. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

The one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'You are my refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.'

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Holy God, I confess that I have bowed before lesser gods and am not worthy to be called Your child. But You are steadfast and faithful; You are loving and patient; You are righteous and desire our return. I come back to You now, Lord, longing for the arms of Your grace and embrace; receive me for the sake of Christ my Lord and Savior. Amen.

Short verse: Exodus 20:1-3 -- 1 And God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

### **Ending Prayer:**

Dear Lord, help me rest in Your love and grace knowing that You alone can forgive, and You are willing through Jesus Christ to do so. May my rest this night be peaceful and a foreshadowing of our eternal rest with You. In Christ, I pray. Amen.



## **Week Four – Commandments**

### **Wednesday – Psalm 119:1-16**

Scripture for Wednesday: Psalm 119:1-16

- 1 Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!
- 2 Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart,
- 3 who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!
- 4 You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.
- 5 Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!
- 6 Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
- 7 I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules.
- 8 I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me!
- 9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.
- 10 With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!
- 11 I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.
- 12 Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes!
- 13 With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.
- 14 In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.
- 15 I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.
- 16 I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Psalm 119 is an acrostic, a Psalm in which each verse opens with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet; what would be the advantage of such a construction?

Psalm 119 is also considered a 'wisdom psalm' meaning that it relies on the notion that wisdom is available to all; who do you consider to be 'truly wise'?

Is obedience the only thing at the heart of our relationship with God?

Have you spent much time or energy in memorizing scripture? Why or why not?

What is the advantage of having memorized scripture?

What happens when we forget God's word?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this text.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, by Your command the sun comes forth to begin the new day.  
By Your Word the earth is renewed and refreshed with life.  
By Your will we are allowed life and the good graces You give.  
By Your wisdom we are guided to walk in Your ways this day and always.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 147:1-11

Bible Reading: Matthew 18:1-14

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, You alone are the God of truth and from Your word do we find wisdom. You speak to us in more ways than we realize. We see Your power and providence in the midst of creation all around us; the mysteries of the ages are child's play to You. We see Your love and compassion displayed for us in Christ Jesus who was able to welcome sinners, touch the outcast, and still greet children with a smile and joy. We feel Your presence and power with us still by the Holy Spirit who speaks to us in whispers so faint that we wonder if we have heard anything at all. Tune our ears and hearts and minds this day, Lord, that we may hear You in new and exciting ways. Govern our lives by Your grace that we may grow closer to You even now. We ask through Jesus Christ, the living word. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart  
Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14, ESV)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 128

### **Prayer:**

Lord, assist me now that I may not reject Your message to me if it come through the simple, through the familiar, through the mundane. Amid the common activities and actions of my life may I sense that You are with me and doing something far greater than I am able to see or know at this moment. Use all that I am and do this day as a means of Your grace for the world that You love and died to save. This is my prayer through Jesus Christ, the life of the world. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord!

I will keep Your statutes. I call to You; save me, that I may observe Your testimonies. (Ps. 119:145-146, ESV)

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 110

Bible Reading: Isaiah 54:1-13

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord, indeed, blessed are they who trust in You. Happy are the holy ones who find life in Your words and in Your way. I rejoice this day, Lord, for I have found You in it—or rather You found me aware and awake and attuned to You; You are with me always, but I am too easily distracted and my attention is too easily diverted from the divine. As I pause even now I sense that I am more rooted in You than I was this morning; the changes are small and some days I may not see them at all, but like a spreading oak, I have grown in small ways this day; eventually I will see it in its fullness and others may find shade in the shadows of the branches that You have blessed. No matter what the world may say, no matter who may scoff and sneer, I know that You are with me and for that I offer You all the thanks and praise of my heart, now and forevermore. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

The one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'You are my refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.'

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Your Word endures forever and Your Word never fails; I confess, however, that I fail You, Lord. Erase all thoughts, words, and deeds from this day that did not bring You glory; write upon my heart that it may never fade those Words of life that You have spoken in and around me this day, so that I may receive Your instruction and be near You always. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Short verse: Psalm 119:11-12, ESV -- 11 I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. 12 Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes!

### **Ending Prayer:**

Dear Lord, help me rest in Your love and grace knowing that You alone can forgive, and You are willing through Jesus Christ to do so. May my rest this night be peaceful and a foreshadowing of our eternal rest with You. In Christ, I pray. Amen.

## **Week Four – Commandments**

### **Thursday – Jesus and the Law**

Scripture for Thursday: Matthew 5:17-48, ESV

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'

22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

31 "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

32 But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'

34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

36 And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the

right cheek, turn to him the other also.

40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

If Jesus came to forgive us, then why does he place such an emphasis on the law?

What does it mean to you that Jesus did not come to abolish the law but fulfill it?

Jesus says many times 'but I say to you...'; where in your life is Jesus trying to say something new to you?

Jesus seems to raise the stakes even higher than those who thought they upheld the law meticulously; why do you think he does that?

This is where we get the saying 'going the extra mile'; where in your life is God asking you now to go that extra mile?

Since none of us is ever 'perfect' what do you think Jesus means that we must be perfect even as God is perfect?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this text.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, by Your command the sun comes forth to begin the new day.  
By Your Word the earth is renewed and refreshed with life.  
By Your will we are allowed life and the good graces You give.  
By Your wisdom we are guided to walk in Your ways this day and always.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 147:12-20

Bible Reading: John 2:1-11

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Holy and righteous God, You are indeed perfect and there is none to compare with You; You are full and complete in all ways, lacking nothing and needing no one; and yet, You choose to love us with a love that is beyond our ken. You call us to do more than we think we can, but You tell us that You will be with us to strengthen us for the task at hand. You call us to live holy and upright lives, and You promise to assist us in doing so. You call us to offer ourselves to You and to others in selfless service, and You have revealed to us in Jesus Christ that You know exactly what that means. Be with us this day, Lord; guide our feet and hands to Your service; guide our minds and hearts to Your love; guide our lives that they may show forth something of the gospel of Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart  
Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14, ESV)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 129

### **Prayer:**

Strengthen me, O Lord, for I wear down with the day's demands. I feel like doing the minimum and forgoing that extra mile You speak of. I feel as if I've already done and given far more than I should when I see how others are living. Remind me again, Lord, that I am living for You and You alone; You are the one who sees and will remember what I have done this day. Help me that I may rise up as with eagle's wings and carry on to the completion of Your calling to me this day. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord!

I will keep Your statutes. I call to You; save me, that I may observe Your testimonies. (Ps. 119:145-146, ESV)

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 132

Bible Reading: II John 1-13

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Great God, You are with us always, even when we are not aware of it. You guide us by an unseen hand that is shaping events that will, in turn, shape us. You have led us into places of blessing and bounty and we are thankful. You are guiding us still so that we may complete our journey and come to the fullness of life that You intend for all Your children. Hear us, Lord, as we give You thanks and praise for what You have done this very day. Hear us, Lord, as we sing to You from grateful hearts that are filled with joy. Hear us, Lord, as we acknowledge that You are the source of all blessing and goodness and life. Be near to us now that we may celebrate what it is that You have done and end this day with gladness and hope. In Your name we pray. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

The one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'You are my refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.'

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Lord God, my failings are many and my faults threaten to overwhelm me. I am so far from perfect that I cannot even conceive of it from here. But You promise that You will accomplish in me what I cannot do myself, and I trust in You to do. Use all of my life this day as You see fit, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Short verse: Matthew 5:48 -- 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

### **Ending Prayer:**

Dear Lord, help me rest in Your love and grace knowing that You alone can forgive, and You are willing through Jesus Christ to do so. May my rest this night be peaceful and a foreshadowing of our eternal rest with You. In Christ, I pray. Amen.

## **Week Four – Commandments**

### **Friday – Paul and Timothy**

Scripture for Friday: 1 Timothy 6:3-16, ESV

3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness,  
4 he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions,  
5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.  
6 Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment,  
7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.  
8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.  
9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.  
10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.  
11 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.  
12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.  
13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession,  
14 to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
15 which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,  
16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.



Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Paul tells Timothy what things to pursue and what things to shun; what does he include in his list of things to pursue?

How does one find contentment in Paul's mind?

How do we connect contentment and the commandments?

Is happiness something that we can pursue directly or only indirectly?

Are most people content or not? What makes you say so?

On a scale of one to ten, where would you rate your own contentment today?

How does one fight the good fight of faith?

Are you winning or losing right now in your opinion?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this text.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, by Your command the sun comes forth to begin the new day.  
By Your Word the earth is renewed and refreshed with life.  
By Your will we are allowed life and the good graces You give.  
By Your wisdom we are guided to walk in Your ways this day and always.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 148

Bible Reading: John 4:46-54

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, You know how restless my heart can be; You know that I am prone to pursue other things than Your will; You know that I have fallen short too many times. Create in me a new heart this day, and keep it in Your care always. Stop me when I am about to stray. Hold me when I am about to fall. Lift me when I am down so that I might walk in uprightness of heart always. Direct me that this day I may pursue only those things that would be a source of blessing for myself and others; make every decision this day one that is grounded in Your wisdom; make every action this day one that is firmly rooted in Your affection. Only in You can I truly find life and the holiness that You desire; remind me that holiness is more important than happiness. I praise You as the only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart  
Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14, ESV)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 130

### **Prayer:**

Lord, the world is running at break-neck speed and doesn't seem to know where it's going. People are all rushing around looking for something that can only come from You; rather than trusting You and waiting on Your timing they are pushing ahead and plodding along and mindlessly working for that which does not satisfy. Help me, Lord, that I may only walk with You—never rushing ahead, never lagging behind, but always in step with You and Your ways for me. I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord!

I will keep Your statutes. I call to You; save me, that I may observe Your testimonies. (Ps. 119:145-146, ESV)

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 89:1-18

Bible Reading: III John 1-15

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Almighty God, You created the earth and that is therein; You created us to know communion with You and one another; You created the heavens and the worlds beyond our understanding; You are the source of all that is and all that will be, visible and invisible, known and unknown. Yet in all of Your mysteries the greatest is that You could stoop to love us as You do. In You we find forgiveness and grace; in You we find peace and prosperity; in You we find wisdom and truth. You are indeed a refuge for us, a help in the midst of all life's troubles. Lord, our work this day has ended and we have come to our rest; we cease from our striving and now relax with those we love; we put our trust in You. Be with us and all we love this evening that in whatever circumstance we may find ourselves we will know Your presence and blessing in all things. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

The one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'You are my refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.'

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Loving Lord, I ask Your forgiveness for any and all ways in which I have failed You this day; by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit convict me of my sin that I may see myself as I truly am, but by that same Spirit convict and correct me that I may become what You would have me be; all of this for the glory of Christ my Lord and Savior. Amen.

Short verse: I Timothy 3:11, ESV -- 11 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

### **Ending Prayer:**

Dear Lord, help me rest in Your love and grace knowing that You alone can forgive, and You are willing through Jesus Christ to do so. May my rest this night be peaceful and a foreshadowing of our eternal rest with You. In Christ, I pray. Amen.

## **Week Four – Commandments**

### **Saturday – The Command to Love One Another**

Scripture for Saturday: John 13:1-20, ESV

- 1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.
- 2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him,
- 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God,
- 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.
- 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.
- 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?"
- 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."
- 8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."
- 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"
- 10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you."
- 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."
- 12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you?"
- 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.
- 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.
- 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.
- 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.
- 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.
- 18 I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'
- 19 I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.
- 20 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

32 If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Picture yourself in the upper room that night; who are you sitting next to? What are you discussing? What are you feeling about Jesus?

What would you do when Jesus comes to you to wash your feet?

What would you say to Jesus when he starts to wash your feet?

What would Jesus say in response to you?

Jesus commands us to love one another; is there someone who you would need to be commanded to love? Who? Why?

How can the church better display to others the love that Jesus has for us all?

What act of loving service could you do today for someone?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this text.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, by Your command the sun comes forth to begin the new day.  
By Your Word the earth is renewed and refreshed with life.  
By Your will we are allowed life and the good graces You give.  
By Your wisdom we are guided to walk in Your ways this day and always.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 149

Bible Reading: John 5:1-15

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, all of creation sings Your name and offers You praise. You have brought forth wonders untold; Your mysteries are too marvelous for words; Your majesty is above every thing which You have created. In the skies we see Your wonders through countless ages and miles of space. In the seas we behold Your creatures that live below the roaring deeps. In the mountains we see the rocks and rills that flow from valley to peak to valley again. In the creatures of the woods we see strength and skill and cunning. Each one gives You praise in its own way, and we, too, sing a song of praise to You for innumerable glories. May I see You in the midst of the marvel of Your creation this day, O Lord. May I feel again the power of Your love for me, even as I serve others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart  
Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14, ESV)  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 131

### **Prayer:**

Lord God, sometimes work is not easy, sometimes it is not clean, sometimes it feels demeaning. Yet, You stooped to serve even when we would not; You did not consider service to be beneath You; You hallowed the smallest task because You did it with the greatest love. Help me, Lord, that I may see in my work the opportunity to serve with you; bless my labors that they may in some small way bring You glory and bring Your grace to all those around me. I ask it through Jesus Christ, the carpenter of Nazareth. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord!

I will keep Your statutes. I call to You; save me, that I may observe Your testimonies. (Ps. 119:145-146, ESV)

Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;

The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: 45

Bible Reading: James 4:13-17; 5:7-11

### **Lord's Prayer**

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord, it was in the evening when You gathered with the disciples and dined those many years ago. In that quiet space You shared the bread with the one who would betray You; You passed the cup with the one who would receive a ransom for Your blood; You bowed yourself to serve those who would desert You in Your hour of agony. Such service is a mystery to us; we live in a world that desires to be comfortable and have others tend to our needs; we live in a world that looks down on those who have to look up to others; we live in a world that believes to not need anyone else is a good thing, a goal to be attained. Help us, Lord, for we do not know how to serve, we do not know how to forgive, we do not know how to love—only You can teach us. May You grant this plea through our Savior and servant of all, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

The one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'You are my refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.'

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Dear Lord, forgive me the pride that keeps me from serving others; forgive me the prejudices that make me feel superior to those I consider inferior; forgive me the lack of love that I show to You and others. Cleanse me and make me love as You love, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Short verse: John 13:34 -- 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

### **Ending Prayer:**

Dear Lord, help me rest in Your love and grace knowing that You alone can forgive, and You are willing through Jesus Christ to do so. May my rest this night be peaceful and a foreshadowing of our eternal rest with You. In Christ, I pray. Amen.

**Week Six – Great Ends of the Church**  
**Monday – Proclamation of the Gospel for the Salvation of Humankind**

Scripture for Monday: John 3:1-21

- 1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.
- 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."
- 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."
- 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"
- 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
- 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
- 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'
- 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."
- 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"
- 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?
- 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.
- 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?
- 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.
- 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
- 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.
- 16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.
- 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
- 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.
- 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.
- 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be



clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

This familiar passage speaks to us of God’s love; how is that love presented here?

What other sayings of Jesus come to mind when we think of the love of God?

Is John 3:16 overused in our world today?

Are you comfortable sharing the love of God in Jesus Christ?

What does it mean to you that we are to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humankind? How and when do we proclaim the gospel?

What hinders our proclamation?

What helps our proclamation?

What comes to mind when you hear the word ‘evangelism’?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Make Your face to shine upon us this day, O Lord,  
And we will live this day in hope, courage, and faith.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 150

Bible Reading: John 6:1-14

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, You have told us that You make the light to shine in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it; You have told us that Christ came to be the light of the world; You have told us that You love us and desire to save us. We hear it, Lord, but we are slow to accept it. We are too wrapped up in our own concerns, our own plans, our own dreams and desires. Help us that we might come to You, that we might listen to You, that we might learn from You, that we might find in You all that we need for fulfillment and joy in the life You grant us. May our thoughts, our words, and our deeds this day bring You glory and in their own small ways proclaim that we are Your children, now and forevermore. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 126

Prayer: Mighty and merciful Lord, Your ways are life and truth and justice and mercy. You have shone Your light into our world so that we might truly see and understand who we are and whose we are. Bless us now that our labors may be labors of love and that our efforts will be blessed for Your purposes. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge;  
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark about you.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 29

Bible Reading: Ephesians 4:1-16

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord, the night is falling about us. It was perhaps a night like this that led Nicodemus to seek You out; You welcomed him and instructed him and gave him opportunity for grace. All around us, Lord, there are those who walk in darkness stumbling through life with little—little hope, little money, little resources, little reason to look for more. Assist us, Lord, that we might be the bearers of good news and new life to all those around us. May we always be ready to share what it is that we have received from You; may we always be ready to make a defense of the hope that is within us; may we always be ready to sow the seeds of salvation to the world all around us. We pray through Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.  
Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Loving Lord, I have sinned against You this day; I have not fully fulfilled Your call to me; I have not loved and cared for the world as I ought. I seek Your grace and forgiveness for my faults; I seek Your Spirit to cleanse my conscience; I seek time that I might amend my ways and grow in sanctification. Guide me by Your grace to Your kingdom of light and life, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Short verse: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

### **Ending Prayer:**

Encircle me and those in this house within the arms of Your mighty embrace this night that we may rest in Your peace and rise again in Your power to serve You and others always.  
Amen.

**Week Six – Great Ends of the Church**  
**Tuesday – Shelter, Nurture, and Spiritual Fellowship**

Scripture for Tuesday: Matthew 18:15-20

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Why is community so important to Jesus?

What are the forces that tend to break up community in the church?

This does not seem to be the typical approach to relational difficulties, does it?

How do most people handle or mishandle conflicts within a community?

Is there anyone close to you now with whom you need to make reconciliation?

Christ promises to be there even when the community is small; what does that say to us in a culture where 'bigger is better'?

When have you felt closest to God or others? What made that possible?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Make Your face to shine upon us this day, O Lord,  
And we will live this day in hope, courage, and faith.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 145

Bible Reading: John 6:15-27

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

O God, You created us for communion with You, but we rebelled and attempted to go our own way; You created us for communion with others, but we let all manner of disagreements and distress come between us. Too often we are ready to walk away from one another; too quickly we are ready to have our own way. True community is Your gift to us, but like most of Your gifts we value it too lightly. Go with me through this day, Lord, so that I may sense Your presence and may move in Your power; be with all who I will encounter this day that they, too, may know that same blessing. Be with us when we meet that we may come to know You with us always. We offer our prayer through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 127

### **Prayer:**

God, throughout the day I encounter a host of people--some familiar, some strangers, all of them loved by You. Remind me, Lord, that there are no chance meetings; You are drawing us together for Your purposes that we might touch one another and be touched by one another. May all that I do this day be blessed for the sake of building up the Body of Christ around me. May I see Your presence in the face of each one that crosses my path this day. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge;  
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark about you.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 15

Bible Reading: Ephesians 4:17-32

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Lord, it is pleasant and sweet when we dwell together in Your fellowship; we are blessed and a blessing to others when we are in accord with Your teachings; we know joy and gladness when we meet in peace! Hear our prayers, O God, that we might always be bound together in the bond of love that You offer us in Your Spirit; gather us together under the shelter of Your wings; guard us together as You protect us from division; make us one together so that we might share our burdens and thereby lighten them, and that we might share our blessings and thereby double them. May all who are gathered here know the blessing of Your love and grace; make us one with all who are one in the body of Christ, wherever they may be; unite us in fellowship until we come at last to that blessed feast in which we will finally know and see the breadth of Your church as we partake in the holy banquet. We ask this through Jesus Christ, who alone is our Lord and head of the Church, now and forever. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.  
Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

### **Prayer of Confession:**

God, I confess that there are times this day when I have not felt You near. Was I turned away from You? Was my mind moving in a selfish direction? Did I ignore Your presence willfully? Forgive me, Lord, for whatever ways in which I have broken fellowship with You or others this day. Be with me now that I might sense Your grace and forgiveness again.  
Amen.

Short verse: For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

### **Ending Prayer:**

Encircle me and those in this house within the arms of Your mighty embrace this night that we may rest in Your peace and rise again in Your power to serve You and others always.  
Amen.

## **Week Six – Great Ends of the Church**

### **Wednesday – The Maintenance of Divine Worship**

Scripture for Wednesday: Psalm 96

- 1 Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!
- 2 Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!
- 4 For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.
- 5 For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
- 6 Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
- 7 Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!
- 8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!
- 9 Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!
- 10 Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity."
- 11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
- 12 let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
- 13 before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

When and where do you find it easiest to worship?

What things are essential for worship to occur?

If you don't sing, how else might you express your worship to God?

What songs, psalms, or hymns are especially important to you? Why?

What has God given you today that is worthy of praise and worship?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Make Your face to shine upon us this day, O Lord,  
And we will live this day in hope, courage, and faith.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 147:1-11

Bible Reading: John 9:1-12, 35-38

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Great God, You caused the sun to rise this morning; You caused the moon to shine last night; You caused rain to fall on the earth and water it; You caused the seeds and plants to grow that we might have food and health; You caused the mysteries of life to come to order that we might marvel and wonder at all You have done. Truly You are worthy of praise and honor, of worship and glory. All of creation gives You praise in its own way, Lord; Jesus said that even the rocks would cry out if we did not sing and shout our praises to You. Help us, Lord, that we might find our own ways to praise You worthily; assist us with the words or thoughts or expressions that will bring You glory as You deserve. Grant to us that we might worship You always and in all ways. We ask through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forevermore. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 128

### **Prayer:**

God of all marvels and mysteries, even among the mundane things of this world Your presence can be felt. You are with me as I work as well as when I worship; You are with me in moments of ecstasy as well as agony; You never leave me alone! May my labors this day be a source of worship; may my hands praise You with all they do; may my actions speak of Your love and grace; may everything and everyone that touches my life this day give Your thanks and praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.



## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge;  
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark about you.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 93

Bible Reading: Ephesians 5:1-20

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Eternal God, Your praises resound forever throughout the heavens; Your praise rises from the earth this night; Your praise will endure to eternity. I bow myself before You now, acknowledging that You alone are God, You alone are righteous, You alone are holy, You alone are deserving of all the praise and honor that I can offer. I join my voice with those who have lived this life and are now counted among the saints surrounding Your throne; I join my voice with the angels who sang at the creation; I join my voice with those who announced Your coming to earth in the Incarnation; I join my voice with all those who have yet to draw breath, but who will join the song that will ring throughout the universe. To You, and You alone, O Lord, be honor and glory and majesty and praise, now and forever. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.  
Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Forgive me, Lord, for I have given my attention and affections and admiration to lesser gods this day. I do not always keep You first in my life; I do not always put You above my own idols; I worship false gods all around me. Cleanse me that I may worship only You and that my worship might be in spirit and in truth. Through Christ I ask it. Amen.

Short verse: 2 Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

### **Ending Prayer:**

Encircle me and those in this house within the arms of Your mighty embrace this night that we may rest in Your peace and rise again in Your power to serve You and others always.  
Amen.

**Week Six – Great Ends of the Church**  
**Thursday – The Preservation of the Truth**

Scripture for Thursday: John 1:1-18

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2 He was in the beginning with God.
- 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.
- 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.
- 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
- 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
- 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.
- 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.
- 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
- 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.
- 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.
- 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,
- 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
- 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- 15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.' ")
- 16 And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.
- 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
- 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

John makes a clear identification of Jesus Christ with the truth; how is Jesus the truth?

Elsewhere in John 14:6 Jesus says that is “the way, the truth and the life”; what does that say to you about who Jesus believes himself to be?

How do you determine truth from falsehood in our day and age?

What forces are seeking to undermine truth in our world today?

Why must truth be preserved?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Make Your face to shine upon us this day, O Lord,  
And we will live this day in hope, courage, and faith.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 147:12-20

Bible Reading: John 11:17-27, 38-44

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

God of all truth and wisdom, in Christ Jesus You came among us full of grace and truth to reveal to us Your ways. Your light shone into the dark places of our world and our lives and drove the shadows away, exposing the reality of what was there. Your word continues to bring light to us even when we would prefer the darkness. The truth is that we seem more comfortable with lies; we are so accustomed to those who bend the truth in our direction that we have a hard time accepting the real truth. Only if You grant us Your grace will we be able to listen to a word truly spoken; only if You grant us Your grace will that truth be able to inform us, and reform us, and transform us into the children of God that You desire us to be. May we hear You today, may we listen and learn, may we be drawn into a richer and fuller life that can only come from You. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 129

### **Prayer:**

Lord, be with me through this day; keep me in the truth. May my work be true and upright; may my words be true and helpful; may my actions be true and useful; may my life be an honest and humble expression of my deepest beliefs. All of this I ask through Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge;  
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark about you.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 96

Bible Reading: Ephesians 6:10-20

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Omniscient God, You alone know how many words I have heard this day, how many images I have seen, how many thoughts have entered my mind, how many feelings have surged through my heart. Much of what I have encountered is not true, much of it has been designed to influence me, to sway me, to persuade me, to get me to buy and believe that which is not true and real. I admit, Lord, that there are times when I am prone to believe what is too good to be true because I think it will be good for me; I am quick to listen to the scams that promise me a better, fuller, thinner, richer, happier life. Guard my thoughts, Lord, so that I will be able to see through the hype and hyperbole that is the common coin of the day; by Your Spirit instruct me in the ways of wisdom so that I am not fooled and led astray; give me the courage to speak the truth that reveal to me so that others will come closer to You. This is my prayer through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh for our sakes. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.  
Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Here at the end of the day I ask that You search my heart, O God. Reveal to me anything that is not pleasing in Your sight, anything that will bring harm to my soul or to others, anything that is not in keeping with Your word. Forgive me where it is needed and grant me the grace that will change my life day by day until I come at last to eternal life with You in glory.  
Amen.

Short verse: 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

### **Ending Prayer:**

Encircle me and those in this house within the arms of Your mighty embrace this night that we may rest in Your peace and rise again in Your power to serve You and others always.  
Amen.

**Week Six – Great Ends of the Church**  
**Friday – the Promotion of Social Righteousness**

Scripture for Friday: Micah 6:6-8

**What Does the LORD Require?**

- <sup>6</sup> “With what shall I come before the LORD,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
<sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”  
<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Make Your face to shine upon us this day, O Lord,  
And we will live this day in hope, courage, and faith.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 148

Bible Reading: Matthew 12:14-21

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Lord God, You have blessed me with another day of life, another opportunity to serve You, another chance to do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with You. Forgive me, Lord, for all the times and ways in which I have not done that which You truly seek. Forgive me of the times that I have performed for others wanting their approval. Forgive me of the times in which I have benefitted from that which did not benefit others. Guide me this day, Lord, that I may learn more and more what truly pleases You. I pray through Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 130

### **Prayer:**

Lord, the day is half spent. I am looking for Your presence and Your guidance in it. Help me in the midst of all the activities that make up my day to see how I might bring about justice with those with whom I work and live. Help me learn the ways of humility and service. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge;  
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark about you.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 100

Bible Reading: Colossians 1:1-14

### **Lord's Prayer**

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

I give You thanks for the day You have given me. I realize that I have not lived it perfectly. I realize that in many ways it could have been so much better. But I also realize that You have been with me in its midst; You have shown Yourself in subtle ways; You have nudged me along the path in the direction that You would have me go. I praise You for all that You do; I thank You for all that You give; I worship You for all that You are. Glory be to You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.  
Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Cleanse me of all my offenses, dear Lord. Renew Your Spirit in me day by day.

Short verse: He has told you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

### **Ending Prayer:**

Encircle me and those in this house within the arms of Your mighty embrace this night that we may rest in Your peace and rise again in Your power to serve You and others always.  
Amen.



## **Week Six – Great Ends of the Church**

### **Saturday – The Exhibition of the Kingdom of God**

Scripture for Friday: Matthew 13:1-23

- 1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.
- 2 And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach.
- 3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow.
- 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.
- 5 Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil,
- 6 but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away.
- 7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.
- 8 Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.
- 9 He who has ears, let him hear."
- 10 Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"
- 11 And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.
- 12 For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.
- 13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.
- 14 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: " 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.
- 15 For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'
- 16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.
- 17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.
- 18 "Hear then the parable of the sower:
- 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.
- 20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy,
- 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when

tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

23 As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Read the passage twice listening carefully for the word or phrase that seems to leap out for you. Write the word or phrase here.

Sit with that word or phrase for a moment or two. Where does that word seem to address your life at this moment?

Why does Jesus so often speak of the Kingdom using parables?

What images of the kingdom come most quickly to your mind?

How and when does the kingdom arrive?

How does one live "in the kingdom" while also living "in the world"?

How do we display the different life of the kingdom to the world around us?

Offer a prayer about what God is saying to you through this story.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Make Your face to shine upon us this day, O Lord,  
And we will live this day in hope, courage, and faith.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Morning Psalm: Psalm 149

Bible Reading: John 7:37-52

Lord's Prayer

Silent prayer for others and myself

### **Morning Prayer:**

Almighty Lord, You are a just and benevolent ruler and Your kingdom is a place of peace and justice. You are a God who shows incredible mercy and grace to all those who will trust in You and enter into Your realm. We long for our world to be the kingdom of Your Son and our Savior now and forevermore. We know that there are those who do not hear Your words; there are those who reject Your parables and wisdom; there are those who turn away from You and seek to rule themselves and others. We claim again this day, O Lord, that You are sovereign, that You are faithful, that You are gracious beyond measure; we long for You to reign in our hearts and minds without rival; bid us to do Your will and grant us the energy and enthusiasm to do it readily and eagerly. Use us this day for the furtherance of Your rule on this earth. This is our prayer which we offer through Jesus who revealed Your reign to us most clearly and compellingly. Amen.

## **Noon Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever.  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Psalm 131

### **Prayer:**

Indeed, it is good to dwell together in unity in the midst of Your realm. Indeed, it is most blessed when we are able to rest in the knowledge that You are the God over all creation. Be with me in my work this day that it may be useful for building up Your kingdom; be with me that I may serve You and others in the opportunities that come to me this day; be with me that I may walk in Your ways always. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen.

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Opening Sentences:**

O Lord, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me.  
God will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge;  
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark about you.  
Praise to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—both now and forever;  
The God who is, who was, and is to come, at the end of the ages.

Evening Psalm: Psalm 27

Bible Reading: Colossians 1:15-23

Lord's Prayer

Silent Prayer for others and myself

### **Evening Prayer:**

Faithful Father, You have watched over Your people through countless days; You have called them back to Your side time and time again; You have desired to establish us as Your children in a world that refuses to acknowledge You. May we be like those who have heard and let Your word take root in our lives; may we be like those who have listened to Your laws and felt our hearts breaking because of our times of disobedience; may we be like those who have been patient and trusting so that we may bring forth fruit worthy to be offered to You. We know that Your kingdom is near—indeed, that it is within us, near to our hearts; help us to desire nothing more than to be close to You, to do Your will, to give You honor and praise, to be Your servants all of our days. These blessings we ask that Your kingdom may be established in us and eventually in all the world. We ask through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God forever and ever. Amen.

## **Night Prayers**

### **Opening Sentences:**

Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.  
Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

### **Prayer of Confession:**

I call You "Lord" and yet I do not do what You ask; I say You are "sovereign" and yet I act as if You are simply a consultant. Forgive me for not honoring You as I should and for not obeying You as I ought. Cleanse me, correct me, command me in Your will. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Short verse: 23 As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

### **Ending Prayer:**

Encircle me and those in this house within the arms of Your mighty embrace this night that we may rest in Your peace and rise again in Your power to serve You and others always.  
Amen.

## APPENDIX NINE

### SERVICES OF EVENING PRAYER

**A Service of Evening Prayer  
Sunday, December 4, 2011  
Mars Hill Presbyterian Church**

O God, come to our assistance.

**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Jesus Christ is the Light of the world.

**The light that no darkness can overcome.**

Stay with us, Lord, for it is evening,

**And the day is almost over.**

Let Your light scatter the darkness

**And illumine Your church.**

**Praise to the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, both now and forever:**

**The God who was, who is, and is to come at the end of the ages. Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

We praise and thank You, O God, for You are without beginning and without end.

Through Christ You are the creator and preserver of all the world; but above all, You are God and Father, the Giver of the Spirit, and the Ruler of all that is, seen and unseen.

You made the day for the works of light,

And the night for the refreshment of our minds and bodies.

O loving Lord and source of all that is good,

Graciously accept our evening sacrifice of praise.

As You have lead us through this day and brought us to night's beginning,

Keep us now in Christ;

Grant us a peaceful evening and a night free from sin,

And bring us at last to eternal life. Through Christ and in the Holy Spirit,

We offer You all glory and honor and worship, now and forever. **Amen.**

Psalm 141

Luke 1:57-66

Silent Reflection

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

To God be honor and glory forever and ever!

**Amen.**

Bless the Lord.

**The Lord's name be praised.**

**A Service of Evening Prayer  
Sunday, December 11, 2011  
Mars Hill Presbyterian Church**

O God, come to our assistance.

**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord from the heavens!

**Praise him in the heights!**

You, O Lord, are my helper and my deliverer.

**O Lord, do not tarry but answer me when I call.**

O Lord, I am Your servant.

**I am Your servant and the child of Your handmaid.**

**Praise to the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, both now and forever:**

**The God who was, who is, and is to come at the end of the ages. Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

We thank You and praise You, O God.

You created us in Your image to share in the blessings of life.

You called us back to Your side when we had strayed in paths of selfishness.

You counsel us so that we may discern the ways of wisdom in this world.

You address us as Your beloved children that we might know Your love.

You redeem us by Your mercy and grace that we may feel Your forgiveness.

You restore us by the mediation of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All praise and honor are due to You, O Lord God.

**Amen.**

Psalm 63:1-7

Luke John 5:30-47 – Witnesses to Jesus

Silent Reflection

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

To God be honor and glory forever and ever!

**Amen.**

Bless the Lord.

**The Lord's name be praised.**

**A Service of Evening Prayer  
Sunday, December 18, 2011  
Mars Hill Presbyterian Church**

O God, come to our assistance.

**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Open my lips, O Lord.

**And my mouth shall proclaim Your praise.**

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who alone does wondrous deeds.

**Blessed be His glorious name forever, and may all the earth be filled with His glory.**

**Praise to the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, both now and forever:**

**The God who was, who is, and is to come at the end of the ages. Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

We thank You and praise You, O God.

Almighty God, You have given us this blessed day in which we have worshipped You with our sisters and brothers; we have fellowshiped with them; we have enjoyed the leisure of life in a day of rest and renewal. We ask now that You be with us in this evening time, so that we may continue to bask in the glow of Your glorious light which we see most clearly in Jesus Christ, the light of the world, and in whose name we pray.

**Amen.**

Psalm 25 – Teach Me Your Paths

John 3:16-21 – For God So Loved the World

Silent Reflection

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

To God be honor and glory forever and ever!

**Amen.**

Bless the Lord.

**The Lord's name be praised.**

**A Service of Evening Prayer  
Wednesday, December 28, 2011  
Mars Hill Presbyterian Church**

O God, come to our assistance.

**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Praise the Lord, all you nations;

**Laud Him, all you peoples.**

For His loving-kindness toward us is great,

**And the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.**

**Praise to the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, both now and forever:**

**The God who was, who is, and is to come at the end of the ages. Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Gracious God, You are our shield and refuge; in You do we find the strength and support we need for each day of life. We thank You, Lord, for You have been with us this day, and Your care for us is continual. We praise You for the sunshine and the glory of creation; we praise You for all those who have come before us to lead us into the faith; we praise You for Your healing touch upon those in need; we praise You for the gift of a Savior in Jesus Christ. Hear our prayers, O Lord, and grant them as You see fit. We ask in Jesus' name.

**Amen.**

Psalm 111 – Great Are God's Works

Matthew 18:1-14 – Greatness and Humility

Silent Reflection

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

To God be honor and glory forever and ever!

**Amen.**

Bless the Lord.

**The Lord's name be praised.**



**A Service of Evening Prayer  
Wednesday, January 4, 2012  
Mars Hill Presbyterian Church**

O God, come to our assistance.

**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Show me Your ways, O Lord, and teach me Your paths.

**Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation.**

**Praise to the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, both now and forever:**

**The God who was, who is, and is to come at the end of the ages. Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Gracious God, we come to offer You thanks for praise for who You are. You are the God of life, the God of light, the God who has given us all good gifts and sustained us in this earthy journey.

We are grateful to gather again to hear Your word, to offer our prayers, to listen to others, to learn and grow more and more into the people You would have us be. We ask for a keen awareness of Your presence with us now, and we ask it in Jesus' name.

**Amen.**

Psalm 99:1-4 – God's Righteousness in Zion

Matthew 2:1-12 – The Visit of the Magi

Silent Reflection

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

To God be honor and glory forever and ever!

**Amen.**

Bless the Lord.

**The Lord's name be praised.**

## APPENDIX TEN

### STUDY INTRODUCTIONS

#### **Elder Education – Fall, 2011 Mars Hill Presbyterian Church Athens, Tennessee**

#### **Week One – The Call**

As we begin the process of preparing to serve as active elders for this congregation and for the church of Jesus Christ, we will undertake a course of study. We will study the Bible which is God's word to us; we will study the Book of Confessions which is tradition's word to us; we will study our own lives in which God is using the Holy Spirit to encourage us and to enable us to serve faithfully and fully. What we are truly doing is entering into a conversation—a conversation between God, others, and ourselves. The word conversation has roots in the Latin *conversation* which means 'to live or keep company with'<sup>1</sup> Conversation also means 1. conduct or behavior, 2. **a** : (1) oral exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, ideas, (2) an instance of such exchange **b** : an informal discussion of an issue by representatives of governments, institutions, or groups **c** : an exchange similar to a conversation; esp.: real-time interaction with a computer esp. through a keyboard.<sup>2</sup> In a very real sense we are going to be living with and keeping company with God and each other over the course of the next few weeks. We are going to be speaking with God and allowing God to speak to us. We are going to be sharing with one another what it is that we hear God saying to us and to the church. We are going to strive to deepen our conversation, our communication with God, so that it truly affects our conduct, behavior, and perspectives as leaders of a spiritual community.

To assist in the conversation we are going to be praying on a daily basis. I am offering guidance for a daily schedule of what is called "fixed hour prayer." The psalmist said that we are to pray throughout the day: Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules. (Psalm 119:164, ESV) Paul told us that we are to pray always: praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints (Ephesians 6:18, ESV). To put it even more succinctly Paul says elsewhere: pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17, ESV). This is a great ideal and marvelous undertaking, but the reality is that we will not be praying always until we have prayed at some specific times. We will not have a continuous and flowing conversation with God until we have a regular and committed time to talk. Until we have a definite schedule for some task, it will tend not to be done. Would it be anything different in terms of our prayers lives? If we do not have at least some times that we set aside for prayer, then we will tend not to be praying much at all.

In the monastic tradition this developed into the Divine Offices, the regularly scheduled services of prayer that marked the daily life of the religious community.

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<sup>1</sup> Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. P. 286.

<sup>2</sup> Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. P. 286.

Prayer would begin before dawn with Vigil, continue at dawn with Lauds, often followed by Mass, then the three smaller services of prayer called the “Little Hours” of Terce, Sext, and None, which would be followed at evening with Vespers, and then the day would close with Compline, the night service of prayer before retiring for the day. This pattern has been followed in monasteries around the world for centuries. At any given moment, there is a group of monks somewhere engaged in prayer together for the sake of the world. The Divine Hours give a structure and flow to the day. The Divine Hours create a rhythm and a balance between work and worship, between prayer and productivity, between stopping and going, between sleeping and waking, between time alone and time together.

But the reality is that most folks with jobs, kids, meetings, clubs, and a host of other activities are not likely to be able to stop seven times during the day for a service of prayer. We may marvel at Muslims stopping at the call to prayers, but we do not usually consider doing the same thing. The question never seems to strike us—why should we? Why should we develop a discipline of regular prayer that would move us towards what Paul was talking about? The best answer to that is because it will increase in us the ability and the attraction and the activity of conversing with God. God wants to reveal more and more of the divine to us. God wants us to have wisdom and guidance and courage and confidence. God wants us to imagine the new things that God is longing to do. The best way for that to happen is for us to stop what we are already doing and pause long enough for God to have our full attention.

What I’m proposing is not seven offices throughout the day—that would be too radical a change for most of us to make. But we could focus more energy and attention on our prayer lives than we are currently doing. What if we were able to set aside four times a day to pray and study and listen and learn what it is that God is saying to us? I’m suggesting that we do a modified model of divine offices and set aside some time at morning, noon, evening, and night.<sup>3</sup> I would suggest that we spend a greater portion of one of those times for Bible study and reading and reflection—say thirty to forty-five minutes, perhaps even an hour if possible. The other “offices” would be brief times of prayer—say five to ten minutes in which we prayed shorter prayers. That would mean that for the next several weeks as we prepared for leadership we would be spending about an hour a day in prayer, study, and reading. That seems a much more reasonable task than seven services a day, but yet it is more substantial than simply sitting through a class once a week and reading a few passages through the remainder of the week. It is often enough so that the conversation can develop over time without long, silent pauses, but it is short enough to become part of the pattern of the day. It is a daily discipline that will transform us over time.

What I’m asking of our elders is not that they suddenly become prayer fanatics, but that they give a consistent, dedicated effort to being mindful of praying on a daily basis. At the end of the week will each of us be able to put a check mark beside every time of prayer that we have scheduled—probably not. But we should be able to see a regular pattern of prayer that is deepening the conversation we have with God and God has with us.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Merton, *Book of Hours*. Kathleen Deignan, ed. [Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2007], 40.

You will see the attached schedule of readings, prayers, reflections and suggestions to enable and encourage your prayer life for the week ahead.

You will also see that each week our scripture readings will focus on a particular theme that is important for us as spiritual leaders; for week one the scripture focus is on call—God’s call to service that has come to others and now has come to us. You may decide when to schedule the Bible readings—some will prefer the morning before the day’s activities have begun; others will prefer the evening when things are slowing down and you have more time to catch your breath and relax. It is less important when you do this activity during the day, than that you do it at some point during the day and you do it consistently.

You may find that writing notes or journaling is a helpful exercise at this time. Just as we take notes when we have a conversation with others about important matters in life, we should want to do the same with our conversation with God. Use the white space in the worksheets to ask questions, to record insights, to make references, to keep track of the conversation for future reference. You might ask yourself what God is saying in each scripture passage, or what responses arise within you when you hear the word, or how you might relate this story to other events in your life. All of this is for your own use.

How may you ask, is all of this going to prepare me to be an elder? Shouldn’t we be looking at the Book of Order and reviewing the organizational chart of the church and the presbytery? My experience has been that very few times do we wrestle with the Book of Order as we gather to lead the church of Christ, but frequently we ask ourselves what God would have us do and how we should be doing it better. In other words, the nuts and bolts are not as important as understanding what the church is supposed to be doing. Our effectiveness as leaders will arise from our conversation with the Living God more than from our knowledge of construction of a church organization.

A word about format. The Bible Study and reflections are on a separate sheet for your convenience. They may be used at any time during the day. The services of prayer are printed out so that you can keep them available; there is space with each if you would like to record notes or thoughts. Please bring all of these back each week as they may be useful in our continuing conversation together.

**Elder Education – Fall, 2011**  
**Mars Hill Presbyterian Church**  
**Athens, Tennessee**

**Week Two – Turning Points**

Last week we explored stories of those who were called. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Apostles—all were called by God to a particular task. It was a task that they could not do alone; it was a task that required God's power and presence to happen; it was a task that meant they were going to be God's minister in that particular situation. For many of them, the call was the first in a long line of conversations with God. They talked with God about why they were not the best person for the job; they talked with God about why someone else (anyone else?) would be better; they talked with God about their lack of gifts or experience; they talked with God about a host of reasons why this was not the job for them. Surely God had made some mistake—surely someone else would be better—surely God did not really expect them to follow God into unknown and uncharted waters. But that was exactly what God had in mind. When God calls people to ministry, God does not make mistakes. God had these people in mind just as surely as God has called you through the voice of this congregation. God desires that you, too, learn to listen to the call and lean into the ministry for which you are preparing.

All along life's way we encounter turning points—those moments in which we can go in one direction or the other. We can look back on our lives and see countless moments in which we opted out of some course of action; it didn't feel right; it was too demanding; it was not what we expected; it was taking us away from something that we valued more—there are any number of reasons why we chose as we did. As we reflect on our lives there may be some turning points that were larger than others—asking our spouse to marry, the birth of our first child, turning down an offer in another city or state, receiving a raise for work well-done, deciding that we would listen when someone asked us about serving as an elder in the church. Yes, this is a turning point. Once you have accepted the call to leadership in the church, church will never be the same for you, and you will never be the same either. This is an important moment in your life and in the life of your congregation.

But we are not the first to go through such things. There are many Biblical stories of folks who encountered turning points that came into their lives. There are plenty of cases where it was God who put that specific set of circumstances that required a decision to be made. There are plenty of times when God closed off other options and guided someone to a course of action that would move directly towards a turning point. Sometimes it was the choice of the one deciding—at other times there were choices made that affected someone in ways they could not have chosen and certainly would not have wanted. Again, in the same way that our lives are a conversation between God, others and ourselves, our turning points are a combination of those three factors as well. We can read again the stories of some who had major shifts take place in their lives and listen in on some of their conversation as well. God's word recounts stories of those like Joseph whose life was turned in radically different directions by the choices of others.

We even get to listen in on some of the conversations that resulted in his being sold into slavery and winding up in foreign land.

Part of what we're trying to do when we read scripture is to read ourselves into the story. We are trying to grasp some idea, some notion, some sense of what is happening to those whose stories we're hearing. What did it feel like to Joseph to be reviled and rejected by his brothers? Have we faced anything similar? What did it feel like for Jonah to book passage away from where God was calling him? Have we ever resisted God and tried to avoid a difficult task? What was it like for Saul to suddenly find himself blind and dumb, unable to comprehend the impact of what had happened on the Damascus Road? When have we been on our way somewhere when we suddenly had to make a detour? Part of the reason the Bible has such life and dynamic is that it recounts stories that have affected us. We do see ourselves in those pages in some respect. We find part of our own stories in the stories of others.

So it is imperative that we learn to listen to scripture if we are to be spiritual leaders. If we are to minister to others to whom God is speaking, then we must be listening as well.

To that end the daily Bible readings that we have been doing have asked some specific questions and given us some specific instructions. What we are learning is a form of the ancient practice of Bible study known as *lectio divina*, which means "holy reading." It is a simple form of study that can be done by anyone; it does not require special schooling or techniques or knowledge of foreign languages. It is simply opening the word and opening our hearts and minds to listen to what God may have to say to us. Each and every time we do so may be a turning point in our lives. But let us look at it bit closer at this form of study.<sup>4</sup>

First, we are to pray for the Spirit of God to be with us as we come to the word. The Spirit is the author and authoritative interpreter of the text for us; we cannot discern God's word without the assistance of God's Spirit. A few moments to quiet the mind and open to the Spirit will make for more fruitful and faithful scripture study.

Second, we are to read, and more importantly, to listen, to a passage of scripture. It makes a difference when we hear the word read aloud rather than simply gathering it through our vision. Indeed, this was the typical way that disciples received the word for generations. Texts were rare and those who could read them were also a minority. In the synagogue there would be those responsible for reading the texts, but the majority of those in attendance would simply be listening. Paul's letters were created with the intent that they be read in the gatherings of the early church. Even in our modern worship it is common prior to the reading of scripture to use the phrase, "Hear the word of God." We listen intently for that word that strikes us, that phrase that arrests our attention, that one thing that seems to have the most life and energy for us this day.

Third, we meditate on that word; we repeat it; we ruminate on it. We give that word or phrase time to speak to us rather than rushing over it and by it. Here we are trusting the Spirit to be active with the Word and active in our lives. God is always speaking, always attempting to get us to see in new ways. Rather than trying to analyze

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Peace. *Contemplative Bible Reading: Experiencing God through Scripture*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998. P. 12-13. There are other discussions of *lectio divina* that one could consider (Peterson's *Eat This Book*, Casey's *Sacred Reading*, Hall's *Too Deep for Words*, etc.) but this offers a simple guideline for the process.



this word or phrase, we simply sit with it a while letting it speak to us. What is the connection between this word or phrase and my own life? Where in my life do I sense this energy?

Fourth, we pray these words and thoughts back to God. We give thanks to God for God's speaking to us; we ask God to give us wisdom to listen and learn from what we have been told; we ask for God's forgiveness if we have been convicted; we give God thanks when we have been comforted; we rest in the fact that God is still working with us and that there is still more to learn and do in this life. The content of the prayer will vary according to what it is that we have heard from God, and we trust the Spirit in this respect as well.

Fifth, we contemplate the word that we have heard. We cease from speaking to God, from telling God what we think is going on, and we simply sit with an openness to God. There is no schedule here, there are no specific points to be made, there is no sense of force or pressure, we are simply sitting with God and allowing God more time in the conversation. This is often a time for silence, both external and internal.

This is different from much of what we are accustomed to doing as Bible Study. Often we have a teacher and a classroom and a marker board and some form of printed material for each individual student. Often these classes seem designed to move us toward "the answer" or the "right way to read this text." Often these courses are helpful, but they are not seeking the same word. They are often a discussion about the text, but not a conversation with the author of the text. Rather than dates and locations and details, this method is attempting to listen carefully to what God is speaking into our lives through a given word, phrase, or passage. It depends on the Spirit as the primary teacher, the Bible as the only text, and the learner as the one for whom this word is spoken. It is a way of deepening our conversation with God and God's word that does not require someone else to act as authority or translator. It is a method that depends on God to do the teaching and each of us to doing the learning.

It is possible to do this by oneself, and indeed, that is part of what we have been doing. One week's practice is perhaps not enough to grasp the power of *lectio divina*, but it is a place from which to start. Most likely when you gain insights from the Bible by the Spirit's prompting, then you'll find that these become part of our conversations with others as well.

It is also possible to do *lectio divina* as a group process so that several folks can listen to the Spirit and perhaps confirm or challenge the word that seems to be coming forth within the group. God is always speaking to the church through the Spirit and that word is usually a public act. Pentecost took place when the believers were gathered together. The Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 became a turning point in the early church as those gathered listened to God and to one another to decide how to best proceed. The church can benefit from this form of study.

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## VITA

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